



Tether by **CrackintoastGromit**

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Summary: Insufferable twin brother? Check. Crush on her best friend? Check. Secret mind control powers? Che- ...wait what? 1984 looks like it's going to be a hell of a year for Faye Wheeler. (OC x Will Byers) (Eleven x Mike Wheeler). SEQUEL NOW POSTED

1. We're just friends

The idea for this story came to me after I saw a lookalike comparison between Finn Wolfhard and Lauren Mayberry- they could be twins. Thus, I started thinking what *Stranger Things* would be like if Mike had a twin sister, and now here we are. I've tried to stick as close to canon as I can without it being repetitive. The story takes place during season 2 of *Stranger Things*, with flashbacks to season 1 (flashback sequences are italicized). Any feedback is greatly appreciated. Rated T for language.

Faye Wheeler lived a normal life, with a normal family in the unremarkable town of Hawkins, Indiana. She had a mom, a dad, an older sister, a younger sister and a twin brother. She went to school, she liked to draw, and she played with her friends. Up until the age of 12, the most interesting thing to ever happen to her was when she and her brother Mike dug up what they thought was a dinosaur tooth in their backyard, but it turned out to be from an alligator. Aside from this, nothing untoward or unexpected ever happened.

Until the night of November 6th 1983.

The vanishing of Will Byers was all anyone was talking about. Phrases like *Missing child* didn't belong in the same sentence as Hawkins, Indiana. Things like that just didn't happen here. That was for the big cities and the movie screens. But it did happen. Will Byers had disappeared and nobody knew where he'd gone. Not his family, not the police, and not Faye- his best friend. As it turned out, Will's disappearance was the catalyst for a series of very untoward and very unexpected events. Ones which would prevent Faye Wheeler from ever describing herself as normal again.

December 1983

"Whoa whoa whoa, that's not it is it?" Dustin exclaims, voicing what everyone in the room is thinking.

Mike shakes his head "No there s a medal ceremony-"

"Oh a medal ceremony?!" Dustin cuts him off, words dripping with sarcasm.

"Yeah man, the campaign was way too short," Lucas chimes in.

"It was 10 hours!" Mike yells.

"But it doesn't make any sense!" Dustin insists.

Mike scowls at him "It makes sense!"

"You left so many plot holes!" says Faye.

Faye, Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Will have spent the last 10 hours embarking on a celebratory *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign- their first since Will had been found after going missing. Faye doesn't understand how every other girl her age doesn't like D&D- it's the best game ever. Even if her stupid brother messed up the story. She's just glad to have their party reunited.

The arrival of Will's brother Jonathan silences their bickering. Will gathers up his things and says goodbye as Dustin and Lucas start play-fighting. Just as Will leaves the room, Faye notices his watch still sitting on the table. She picks it up and hurries after him, narrowly avoiding Dustin's elbow hitting her in the face as she passes.

"Will! Wait up, you forgot your watch!"

Will is waiting by the front door, Jonathan having been intercepted by Faye's sister Nancy. He smiles when he sees her.

"Oh yeah, thanks" he says, returning the watch to his wrist. He then looks at Faye with a sheepish expression "Actually, I kinda left it on purpose."

Faye frowns at him "Why?"

Will opens his backpack and pulls out a folded piece of paper "Because I wanted to give you this. I thought the others might get mad because we did Secret Santa and you're not supposed to get anyone else presents."

Faye takes the paper, raising her eyebrows "Not like you to break the rules."

"Yeah but this doesn't technically count as a present because I didn't buy it," Will grins.

Laughing at his warped logic, Faye opens out the paper and sees it is one of Will's drawings. Of the group, she and Will are the only ones who really like to draw so it's something they often do together. This particular drawing is of them, the whole party, in various heroic poses. They're wearing capes in each of their favorite colors (Faye's being purple) and brandishing swords. It isn't until Faye gets to the last figure on the page that she realizes who it is.

"Is that..."

"Eleven," Will answers "Yeah. I wasn't sure exactly what she looked like, but I know you guys really miss her so I thought she should be in the picture."

At that moment Faye feels two contradictory emotions; a surge of affection for Will and a pang of sadness for her lost friend. The appearance of Eleven had been as unexpected as the disappearance of Will. They had found the strange, quiet girl out in Mirkwood and snuck her back to their house without their parents' knowledge. Faye is still impressed they managed to pull that off. While they had doubts at first, Eleven soon became one of them and helped them get Will back. Having grown up surrounded by boys, El was the first girl friend Faye ever had and she misses her terribly. Almost as much as Mike does.

"Thank you, I love it" Faye smiles.

Will shrugs, looking embarrassed. He always gets embarrassed at compliments "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," reciprocates Faye. Spontaneously, she leans in and gives Will a hug. They aren't a particularly touchy-feely group, but sometimes, when the moment calls for it, a hug, a pat on the back or even holding someone's hand is acceptable. Will returns the hug and for the millionth time, Faye feels a flood of gratitude that she has her

best friend back.

Jonathan clears his throat loudly and the two spring apart. Both of their older siblings are smirking at them "You ready Will?"

"Yeah," Will nods.

Something suddenly occurs to Faye "Hey, how did you know I'd be the one to notice your watch?"

Will laughs "I'll give you five dollars right now if Dustin and Lucas aren't down there fighting and Mike isn't sulking."

Faye joins in the laughter- Will is smarter than people give him credit for. She waves goodbye and the Byers leave, Will's drawing still clutched in her hand.

"Soo," Nancy singsongs "You and Will?"

Faye feels her cheeks flush, but two can play at that game "You and Jonathan?"

The smirk drops from Nancy's face "What? No he's, we're just friends."

Faye raises her eyebrows, muttering "*Sure*" under her breath as she goes upstairs to the bedroom she shares with Mike. Grabbing a pin from the desk, she puts Will's drawing up on the wall next to her bed- the newest addition to the collage of artwork already on display. As she goes back to join the others, Faye realises she hadn't denied Nancy's insinuation that she and Will like each other.

October 1984

The streets of Hawkins are aglow with candles and Jack-O'-Lanterns, and the town's Halloween preparations are in full-swing. For one small group of Middle Schoolers, there isn't a costume or scary mask in existence more terrifying than what they had come face to face with the previous year. However, they are doing their best to follow instructions and get on with their lives as best they can. And for a while, it seems to be working.

Faye, Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Will have been looking forward to

Halloween even more than usual. Ever since they saw the movie *Ghostbusters* over the summer, they knew exactly what their costumes were going to be. There had been some dispute over who got to be who (Mike and Lucas fighting over the role of Venkman), but eventually they came to an agreement. Faye is to be Dana Barrett- the female lead- but her mother says Faye is too young to wear Dana's iconic, albeit skimpy, orange dress. Faye begged and pleaded for weeks, insisting that the only other female character was Janine Melnitz and there was no way she was being the boys' secretary. Eventually her mom relented, on the condition she would tweak the dress to "make it more appropriate."

With Halloween still a few days away, the party decide to spend an evening at the arcade. Faye had been saving up her allowance, but Mike had spent all of his on sweets, as usual. Faye watches in amusement as her brother pulls up each of the couch cushions searching for change.

"Why did you spend your allowance on candy when it's Halloween in three days?" Faye demands "We're about to get tons of it, *for free!*"

"Well what was I supposed to do until then?" Mike snaps, tossing aside the final cushion. Suddenly his face lights up and he dashes from the room, his footsteps thundering up the stairs. A minute later Faye hears a shriek that can only be Nancy, followed by Mike running back down. He reappears stuffing fistfuls of change into his pockets then grabs Faye's wrist.

"We gotta go!"

Mike pulls her through the house and out the back door as Nancy pursues them, screaming Mike's name. Faye frowns "Did you take her money?"

"I'll pay her back!" Mike yells.

The twins grab their bikes and jump on just as Nancy bursts through the backdoor. She runs after them for a few paces, but quickly gives up and settles for shouting "Asshole!" at Mike. Faye shakes her head.

"You are so dead when we get back."

"She'll have to catch me first," Mike retorts.

Dustin and Lucas are waiting for them outside the arcade and ' car pulls up a few minutes later. Ever since Will had been found, his mom barely lets him out of her sight. He isn't allowed to bike anywhere and he can't stay out after dark, even at weekends. Before, the group would do pretty much whatever they wanted and as long as they were back for dinner their parents didn't mind, but now Will's mom has to know exactly where they are, what they are doing and when they'll be home. Faye can't blame her really, they all thought they'd lost Will for good last year and none of them want to go through that again.

"What's taking so long?" asks Dustin.

"His mom is probably just making sure he's okay," Faye shrugs.

Eventually, Will gets out of the car and runs over to join them. Dustin hastily ushers everyone inside, desperate to try and beat the top score on *Dragon's Lair*- something he's been trying and failing to do for weeks. Faye bumps Will's shoulder playfully.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, my mom's just driving me a little crazy," Will admits.

Faye nods "Mine too."

"At least yours doesn't burst in on you while you re peeing because she didn't know where you were for two seconds."

Faye grimaces "My mom doesn't do *that*, but she did burst in on Nancy and Steve yesterday..."

Will's eyes widen "You mean?"

"Yep."

"Blurgh, gross!" he shudders.

"Steve was staying for dinner as well and my mom was just giving him this death glare the whole time, it was hilarious," Faye smirks.

Will laughs heartily and Faye smiles at how happy and relaxed he looks. It's a rare look for him these days. When he was first brought back from the Upside Down, everyone was so relieved and excited to see him that no-one really noticed anything was wrong. But after Christmas the worry crept in; if ever Will was too quiet, if he came to school with bags under his eyes, if he was even a minute late for class- they'd panic. Their brains would start going haywire and throwing out wild, ridiculous theories about Will's well-being, demanded answers to questions they dared not ask. Is Will okay? Has he been weird today, do you think? Why does he look so tired all the time? He didn't finish his lunch, do you think he's sick? What if it happens again? What if the Demogorgon comes back?

Each and every one of them were guilty of it. Will knew it too, and he hated it. Faye could tell. They were essentially treating him like a baby, not like a friend. Faye tried extremely hard to reel in the over-protective instinct, to just go back to the way things were before. It wasn't easy, but she liked to think she managed better than the others. Maybe it was because she was a girl; her mom said girls notice things boys don't, that they're better at picking up on emotions. Maybe she was just better at picking up on Will's emotions. Whatever the reason, Faye is just glad whenever she sees Will smile, and even gladder when she is the cause of it.

The group do the rounds of their favorite games and are shocked to discover there is a new high-scorer in town by the name of MADMAX. Whoever they are, they've knocked Dustin off the top-spot in almost every game- much to his outrage. Dustin demands to know who this mysterious MADMAX is, but Keith- an arcade employee who is rude to everyone and never appears to wash his hair- refuses to tell them without something in return.

"No way! You're not getting a date with her!" says Mike when he realises what Keith is hinting at.

Lucas turns to him "Mike, come on just get him the date!"

"I'm not prostituting my sister!" Mike snaps.

"But it's for a good cause," Lucas insists.

Faye glowers at Keith "Firstly, Nancy already has a boyfriend. And secondly, even if she didn't, I have heard her call you creepy."

A grin stretches across Keith's face "So she talks about me, huh?"

"Unbelievable," Faye exclaims, throwing her hands up in resignation. Dustin continues to argue with Keith about MADMAX when Faye hears the door to the arcade jingle shut. She turns around and notices Will is missing.

"Mike," she whispers, not wanting to cause a scene. Mike glances over his shoulder and realizes what's wrong.

They look at each other with concern then head outside. Will is standing a few paces from the door with his back to them, staring off into the distance. He is unnaturally still, as if something has paralyzed him.

"Will?" Faye calls. Will doesn't respond.

"Will?" Mike tries. Still nothing.

Faye's heart jumps into her mouth. Mike shouts Will's name again, louder, and this time he spins around. He looks like he's seen a ghost.

"Are you okay?" Faye asks.

Will seems disoriented and keeps looking back out at the road opposite. "Yeah," he says eventually "I just needed some air."

Mike walks up and puts an arm around Will's shoulders "Come on, you're up on Dig Dug."

They escort Will back inside. Thankfully, Dustin and Lucas didn't even notice they left and are still trading insults with Keith. Will goes strangely quiet and Mike meets Faye's gaze with a worried expression. Being twins, they have learnt to communicate without words.

What do we do? Mike's eyes ask.

I don't know Faye shrugs.

Mike inclines his head towards Will *Should we talk to him about it?*

Faye shakes her head *No, he won't like it.*

"Will! You're up man!" Dustin announces "Let's show this MADMAX who really runs things around here."

In no-time at all it's 9PM and Will's mom is outside. They bid him goodnight and Will waves then gets in the car and drives off. The rest of them unchain their bikes and head home- Mike's question comes the second Lucas turns into his driveway and he and Faye are alone.

"What happened with Will?"

"I have no idea," says Faye "He said he just needed air."

"So why didn't he turn around when we called him?" Mike reasoned.

Faye frowns, trying to picture the scene again "It was like he was staring at something, like there was something out there we couldn't see."

Mike pauses "You don't think he saw the Demogorgon do you?"

"No," Faye answers immediately "Will's not stupid. If he saw that he would've told us."

"Well something's up," Mike states.

Faye can't dispute this, nor can she shake the uneasy feeling which comes over her.

2. You kissed her, didn't you?

"Will!"

"Will where are you!"

"Will it's us!"

"Will!"

The rain is pelting down with a vengeance, the cold biting at their wet faces. Faye zips up her jacket as far as it will go and pulls her hood forward. She isn't giving up. She isn't going home until they find him.

It's almost pitch black, the moonlight obscured by a thousand tree branches twisting and interlocking overhead. Only the beams from their flashlights guide them as the four friends venture further into the woods.

"Will!" Faye yells for the hundredth time. She strains her ears, trying to pick out a human voice amidst the downpour. He has to be here. The Police Chief had found Will's bike by the side of the road next to the woods. Maybe he had been hit by a car? Maybe he wandered into the woods to find shelter because he was too injured to get home? Or maybe someone was chasing him and he came in here to hide. Whatever the case, this was the only place he could be- surely.

"Guys I really think we should turn back," Dustin announces.

Faye rounds on him "We're not going anywhere until we find him!"

"Seriously Dustin, you wanna be a baby? Then go home already!" snaps Lucas.

Dustin pauses before speaking again "You ever think Will went missing because he ran into something bad? And we're going to the exact same spot where he was last seen? And we have no weapons or anything?"

"Dustin shut up," Mike orders.

"I'm just saying, does that seem smart to you-"

"Shut up!"

Faye suddenly realizes why her brother has stopped. There is a rustling sound coming from their left. "D'you guys hear that?"

A twig snaps loudly and they all jump, shining their flashlights in the direction of the noise. Even with the light it's hard to make out shapes through the sheets of rain and deceptive shadows. Faye's arm is shaking. What if Dustin is right? What if something bad got Will? And now it was going to get them.

Something moves behind them and their breath hitches. They spin round and find a pair of eyes looking back at them, but they aren't Will's. A girl of approximately their age is standing before them clad only in a bright yellow t-shirt. She is soaked through and panting heavily, as if she's been running. Her feet are bare and her hair is cropped so short she almost looks like a boy.

"Who are you?" Lucas asks.

The girl doesn't speak.

"Are you lost?" Mike adds.

No response.

Faye raises her voice in case the girl can't hear properly "Have you seen our friend Will? We're looking for him."

Her eyes suddenly fix on Faye; the girl's mouth quivers as if she wants to speak, then all of a sudden she collapses and falls to the ground.

"Oh shit!" Dustin exclaims as they all surge forwards and bend down. "What's wrong with her?"

"I'm guessing Hypothermia, she doesn't even have shoes on!" Lucas observes.

"We gotta get her home, then we can call her parents, or a hospital," says Mike.

Faye turns to him "We can't go back! What about Will?"

"She could be dying!" Mike yells "Besides we've been looking for hours, if we stay out any longer mom will ground us until we're eighteen then we'll never be able to find him."

Faye wants to protest. Will could be lying unconscious twenty feet away. He could be in serious trouble- he needs them. But then she looks down at the figure crumpled at their feet, helpless and shivering, and she realises this girl needs them too.

"Okay."

Dustin and Mike lift up her small form and each put one of her arms around their shoulders. She's still conscious, but barely.

"Let s go," says Mike. Faye does one last sweep of the surrounding wood with her flashlight, then turns to follow the others.

The next morning at school, Faye and Will head to the lockers to retrieve their books for class. First period is Science with Mr. Clarke- the best teacher at Hawkins Middle School. Will seems brighter than he did last night and Faye can only hope whatever the problem was has gone away.

As Will opens his locker, a piece of paper flutters out which he plucks from the air. After glancing at it for a second, Will balls it up and stuffs it into his pocket.

"What's that?" Faye asks.

"Nothing," Will mumbles.

Faye raises her eyebrows "Yeah right. D'you have a secret girlfriend we don't know about?"

"No."

"Then what?"

Will sighs and hands the paper to Faye who smooths out the creases until it's legible again. It's a newspaper cutting from just after Will was found; the headline reads 'The Boy Who Came Back to Life' and there's a photo of Will, but someone has written 'Zombie Boy' across

the article.

"What the fuck?" Faye exclaims "What sick freak would do this?"

"It doesn't matter," says Will.

"Yes it does!"

Will shrugs "It's not every day."

Faye stares at him "This has happened before?"

Will closes his eyes, clearly wishing he hadn't mentioned that part "Look, it happens and there's nothing I can do about it, so I'm just ignoring it."

Faye opens her mouth to argue, but forces the words back. She can see Will already starting to clam up and she doesn't want him to shut down completely. "Okay."

"Please don't tell the others," Will implores.

Faye nods and Will gives her a grateful smile "Thanks. Sometimes I feel like you're the only one who gets it."

"Gets what?"

Before Will can answer, the bell rings and they sprint down the hall to first period. In a very unexpected turn of events, the one and only MADMAX turns up in their class as a transfer student from California. And not only that, MADMAX is a girl. She has long red hair and the stereotypical California tan, quickly correcting Mr. Clarke when he calls her Maxine.

"No-one calls me Maxine, it's Max."

As Max takes her seat at the back of the room, the group all turn around to stare at her. Faye can't believe it; she's never met another girl who likes video games. Apparently video games are for boys and makeup is for girls. Faye thinks this is stupid. She doesn't see why people have to choose. Some evenings, Faye would go up to Nancy's room and her sister would put her hair in a French plait or paint her

nails- and others she would sit and play D&D in the basement with the boys for hours on end. Faye enjoyed both, even if the others made fun of her whenever she spent too much time doing "girl stuff."

The group observe Max with quiet fascination throughout the day, learning that in addition to playing video games, she also likes to skateboard- and she's good at it, too. California is full of hills, by all accounts, so it makes sense. After school they watch from a distance as Max practises tricks outside the History block.

"You realize this is kinda creepy," Faye announces.

Ignoring her comment, Mike shakes his head "There s no way that's Madmax."

"Yeah, girls don't play video games," adds Will.

Faye frowns at him "Oh yeah? So how come I always beat you?"

Dustin and Lucas snigger as Will's face flushes "You're different, but most girls don't."

"Even if they did, you can't get 750,000 points on Dig Dug. I mean that's impossible," Mike insists.

"But her name is Max," says Lucas.

"So?" Mike counters.

"So how many Maxes do you know?"

"I don't know."

"Zero, that's how many."

Dustin nods "Yeah and she shows up at school the day after someone with her same name breaks our top score, I mean, you kidding me?"

"Exactly! So she's gotta be Madmax. She's gotta be," Lucas states with finality.

"And plus she skateboards so she's pretty awesome," Dustin grins.

Mike glares at him "Awesome? You haven't even spoken a word to her!"

"She skateboards and she likes video games, what more do you want?" asks Faye.

"Yeah, I mean just look at her-" Dustin cuts himself off as they turn around and realize Max has disappeared "Shit! I've lost the target."

"There!" says Will, gesturing towards the other side of the building. The party watches as Max throws a crumpled piece of paper into the trash before heading inside. It takes them all of three seconds to unanimously dash over to the trash can, with Mike trailing behind.

"Got it!" Dustin exclaims after diving straight into the pile of garbage. He unfurls the paper to see the words 'Stop spying on me, creeps!' scrawled across it. Faye bursts out laughing.

"Case and point- she's awesome!"

"William Byers?"

The group turn around in surprise to see Mr. Foster, the History teacher, standing in front of them looking expectantly at Will. "Your mother is here."

Will's face falls as he realizes it's time for his appointment. The others mirror his expression. With a small sigh, Will quietly says goodbye and is led off by Mr. Foster. With all the excitement over Halloween, Faye had completely forgotten Will's next appointment was due. Every few weeks he had to go into Hawkins National Lab and have a bunch of wires stuck to him while he was poked and prodded and questioned about the Upside Down. Faye couldn't fathom what purpose these appointments served. They only seemed to make Will uncomfortable and anxious every time he thought about going in. The rest of them had all been instructed to go back to normal, to try to forget everything that had happened last November- but Will was being forced to re-live it over and over again. How was he supposed to go back to normal like that?

"You think he's okay?" asks Dustin.

"He's always weird when he has to go in," Lucas points out.

Mike isn't convinced "I don't know, he was quiet today."

"He's always quiet," says Lucas.

Faye shakes her head "No, something's up."

Mike turns to her "What do you mean?"

The words are on the tip of her tongue, but Faye promised she wouldn't say anything to the others about the notes in Will's locker. Mike is looking at her with his 'what aren't you telling me' face and she doesn't want to lie, but she won't break her promise.

"Just that he was worried about the appointment. Maybe that's why he was weird last night." It's not technically a lie and although Mike's eyes linger on her questioningly for a moment, he doesn't push the matter.

Later that evening at the dinner table, their mom informs them they have to donate two boxes of toys each to the upcoming yard sale. Faye just hums in agreement, not having paid much attention to the conversation. She wants to call Will to see how the appointment went, but she doesn't want to seem like she's checking up on him. Faye snaps out of her thoughts when she hears Mike raise his voice.

"I didn't steal, I borrowed it!"

Their mom has her serious face on "Oh and you didn't curse at Mr. Kowalski last week either, right? Or plagiarize that essay? Or graffiti the bathroom stall?"

"Everyone graffitis the bathroom stall," says Mike.

"They do mom," Faye agrees.

"So if your friend jumps off a cliff, you're gonna jump too?" their dad asks through a mouthful of chicken.

Their mom puts down her fork with a sigh "Look we know you've had a hard year Michael, but we've been patient. This isn't strike one, this

isn't even strike three." She gestures to Faye "Your sister's been through everything you have and she doesn't do all these things."

A twinge of guilt settles in Faye's stomach. That wasn't strictly true. She and Mike had both been through hell over the past year, but the difference was Faye had her best friend back. Will had been found, and while Mike was Will's best friend too, he also had a very close bond with Eleven. And she was gone. All of them had been devastated when El sacrificed herself to destroy the Demogorgon, but it hit Mike the hardest. From the moment they found El in the woods, he had been the one to take care of her, to help her, to believe her when no-one else did.

Faye knew Mike was only acting out because he was hurt. That's just the way he was. Mike wasn't really one for hugs and deep emotional conversations, he preferred to just deal with things on his own. And right now, the hurt plus teenage boy hormones was turning him into a bit of a troublemaker. Of course, she couldn't explain any of this to their mom, so she just sat quietly.

The remainder of dinner passes in awkward silence, then Faye and Mike head up to their bedroom to start sorting through the toys. They've always shared a room, ever since they were brought back from the hospital. Their parents hadn't been expecting twins, but they didn't have the money to move to a bigger house. Most of the time Faye doesn't mind; it's only when Mike is being particularly moody-like now- that she wishes she could have her own space. Sometime she'll stay up late sketching and Mike will yell at her for keeping the light on when he's trying to sleep. Or he'll leave a mess on her side of the room then refuse to tidy it up, saying "it's your side, so it's your mess." Faye is secretly hoping that when Nancy goes off to college in a few years she can have her room, but until then she just has to deal with Mike's temper.

"Mom wouldn't be so harsh if she knew," says Faye.

"Knew what?" Mike mumbles.

"About Eleven."

Mike doesn't respond to this and goes back to throwing toys into the

cardboard box in front of him, with more force than is necessary. Normally Faye would just let it drop, but she's worried about him.

"I know you try to call her every night on the radio."

Mike's head snaps up "You've been spying on me?!"

"Mike it's okay," Faye's voice softens "I miss her too."

For a moment, Mike looks like he's about to explode at her, but then the anger seems to drain out of him. As if he doesn't have the energy for it anymore. He sits back on his bed on the opposite side of the room, his fingers fiddling with the dinosaur toy in his hands.

"I just wish I could see her again. Just once."

Faye nods "Me too."

There's a brief spell of silence before Faye grins and says in a teasing voice "You kissed her didn't you?"

Mike grabs the nearest pillow and promptly throws it across the room at Faye's head.

3. Why is no-one else wearing costumes?

"Mom, come on that's enough!" Faye insists as her mother forces her to pose for the tenth photograph that morning.

"I'm almost done I swear! Just a couple more," her mom answers, bending down to collect the Polaroids scattered on the ground at her feet.

Mike crosses his arms impatiently "We're gonna be late!"

"Okay okay, just one more of the two of you together!"

Faye and Mike grudgingly stand next to each other as their mom takes what they hope is the final picture of the them in their Ghostbusters costumes. Their dad bought the camera last year, supposedly to photograph local wildlife- which he never did; then their mom discovered it gathering dust in the attic and had been glued to the damn thing ever since. Any time something remotely noteworthy happened, out came the camera. A rose in the flower patch. Nancy in a new dress. A nice family meal (although those were decidedly rare). The most recent, and disturbing, one was Holly potty training.

"Why are you taking pictures of that?!" Mike had asked in disgust.

"It's an important achievement and I want to document it for her," their mom reasoned.

"What, so she can show the photos at her graduation?" Faye had quipped, earning a reproachful look in return.

Finally, the two of them make it out of the house and on their way to school. In all fairness, their mom had done a good job on the costumes; although biking in a dress wasn't the most sensible decision Faye ever made, and she had to bundle the skirt around her waist to stop it from snagging on the pedals. They meet up with Lucas and Dustin on the corner and Will is waiting by the bike-stands outside school. Initially, they are all overcome with excitement, but suddenly Mike frowns and turns to Lucas.

"Whoa whoa whoa, why are you Venkman?"

"Because I'm Venkman," Lucas answers.

"No I'm Venkman!"

"Why can't there just be two Venkmans?" Will shrugs.

Faye notices the label on Mike's costume, it having previously been covered by his pack strap, and has a disturbing realization "You can't be Venkman."

Her brother glares at her "What do you mean I can't be Venkman?!"

"Because Venkman and Dana get together and I'm Dana!"

Mike's face twists into an expression of revulsion "EW, GROSS!"

"Exactly! So you can't be Venkman!" Faye states matter-of-factly.

"Thank you," says Lucas, grinning in triumph.

Mike shakes his head "It's not like we're gonna act stuff out from the movie! Look, we planned this months ago!"

Faye rolls her eyes as Mike continues to argue his point, but Dustin's shouts soon silence their quarreling "Guys? Why is no-one else wearing costumes?"

An unpleasant sinking feeling erupts in the pit of Faye's stomach as she glances around and realizes Dustin is right. They are the only ones in the entire school wearing costumes. People have already started pointing and sniggering as they walk past. Faye isn't usually one for cursing, but the words "Son of a bitch!" are expelled from her mouth with considerable vigor.

The day passes in a blur of embarrassment. Thankfully, the group have all the same classes so at least they're suffering together; if Faye had to face the prospect of being the only one in the room with a costume on she would have hid in the bathroom rather than endure the humiliation. She loses count of the number of times someone shouts "Who ya gonna call?" or "Nerds!" in the hallway. Glancing at

Will, Faye wonders whether 'Nerd' is worse than 'Zombie Boy,' and decides that it isn't. Nerd is a generic insult, but Zombie Boy only applies to Will- singles him out. At least there are no notes in his locker today.

After class, Dustin and Lucas ask if Faye minds Max coming Trick or Treating with them that evening. Faye happily agrees, as does Will, but she points out that Mike won't like it. The others are too excited to consider this and they hurriedly run off to find Max. Faye and Will exchange knowing looks, wondering how long it will take for Dustin and Lucas to start fighting over the new girl. By the time the final bell rings, Faye is flooded with relief.

"*Thank God,*" she exclaims "I thought this day would never end."

Will nods, mirroring her expression "Same."

"Oh well, at least now we can start getting ready for the best night of the year! Even if we have to deal with Mike being moody the whole time."

Will is strangely quiet and Faye tilts her head at him "What's wrong?"

"Jonathan has to come with us tonight. Come with me anyway..." Will says in a bitter tone. Faye's first instinct is to comfort him, but she knows that will just make him feel worse. So instead she attempts lightheartedness.

"Oh, well that's okay. Jonathan's cool"

"Yeah," is all Will says in response. Faye lets the issue drop. If Will wanted to talk about it he would, but he's clearly sick of talking about everything. The only thing she- all of them- can do is to try to be as normal as possible. So she says goodbye to Will then goes to meet the others and heads home, hoping they'll be able to cheer him up later.

Faye, Mike, Dustin and Lucas spend the afternoon watching scary films (although it's hard to be scared when Lucas is screaming like a girl and making them laugh the whole time), waiting for it to get dark. Faye warns the others not to comment on the fact Jonathan will

be joining them. Dustin and Lucas don't mention Max, so Faye guesses she already had someone to go Trick or Treating with. Bags in hand and costumes donned, they head outside at 6.30PM just as Jonathan's car pulls up. To their surprise, Will exits alone and runs over smiling wider than he has in months. Faye can't help but smile back, having almost forgotten how infectious Will's happiness is. How he can go from the quiet one to the heart and soul of the group, if he wants to.

With years of Trick or Treating expertise at their disposal, the gang know exactly which route to take to ensure they get the best haul. Which houses have the most candy. What shortcuts are the quickest. Where the grouchiest neighbors live that never answer the door and turn the sprinklers on if anyone sets foot on their lawns. As they walk past one such neighbor, Lucas pushes Dustin onto the grass they all scream with laughter as he zigzags to avoid the water sprays. To Mike's annoyance, Max pounces on them a few streets in and he proceeds to sulk and trail behind.

Faye pulls faces into the video camera Will has borrowed from Bob- his mom's new boyfriend- and Will laughs, before glancing back over his shoulder. "You think he's okay?"

"Mike? He's just being a baby."

Max grimaces "Well he clearly doesn't like me very much."

Lucas quickly jumps in "He's always been moody, that's his thing."

"Yeah," Dustin agrees "Mike is the moody one. Will's the quiet one. Faye's the smart one. Lucas is-"

"The handsome one," Lucas interrupts, grinning at Max. Faye and Will bite their lips to keep from laughing.

"Clearly *I'm* the handsome one," Dustin counters, winking at Max.

While Dustin and Lucas try to impress a bemused Max, Will falls back to walk next to Mike- probably so that he won't feel left out. Faye doesn't understand what her brother's problem is. He hasn't even given Max a chance. They continue down the street for a few more

minutes, then suddenly Mike cries out from behind them.

"Will?!"

Faye spins around. Mike is standing alone, turning madly on the spot and shouting Will's name. "What happened? Where's Will?"

"I don't know! I turned my back for like one second and he was gone!" says Mike.

"There!" Faye shouts, spotting Will huddled behind a wall. She and Mike sprint over to him and his expression sends a cold shiver down Faye's spine. His eyes are completely glassed over and his movements are twitchy and unnatural, like he's not controlling them.

Faye grabs his shoulders "Will Will! Are you okay?"

Will shrieks and appears to snap out of whatever daze he was in. He's panting heavily and his eyes dart in different directions like he's looking for something. Mike shoves her out of the way.

"Will, what's wrong? We couldn't find you, are you hurt?"

"Holy shit!" Dustin exclaims as he, Lucas and Max run over. Will is still shaking and whimpering, seemingly unable to answer them. Faye frantically scans his body looking for any injuries, but there don't appear to be any.

"I'm gonna get you home okay," Mike announces, pulling Will to his feet.

"I'll come with you," says Faye.

"No!"

Will's shout is so loud, each and every one of them jump. Suddenly Faye finds breathing difficult as she processes what Will has said. Will stares at her, looking as surprised as the rest of them about what just came out of his mouth, then he drops his gaze and there's silence.

Mike puts an arm around Will's shoulders "Just keep Trick or Treating, I'm bored anyways."

With that, he escorts Will away and the group are left standing in disbelief. Faye doesn't understand what just happened. One minute Will was fine, then the next he was having some sort of fit. And why didn't he want her to go with him? Her chest clenches painfully. Will had never yelled at her like that before.

Faye is vaguely aware of the others starting a conversation, but she doesn't pay any attention. She feels the tell-tale sting of tears in her eyes and quickly blinks them away as Dustin puts a hand on her shoulder "You okay?"

"Fine," she answers, annoyed at how not-fine her voice sounds.

They visit a few more houses, but the appeal of Trick or Treating has somewhat worn off after Mike and Will's departure. Faye walks silently a few paces behind the others, replaying the last hour over and over again in her head- trying to figure out what went wrong. What triggered Will's strange behavior. A surge of fear grips her as she wonders whether Will might have had some sort of flashback to the Upside Down; from what she'd read on PTSD it was a fairly common occurrence. *No* her mind reasoned *He would have said if that were the case.*

It just didn't make sense, and Faye couldn't pretend Will's outburst didn't hurt. A lot. They were all best friends in the party, but it would be a lie to say they were all equally close. Dustin and Lucas had numerous private jokes the rest of them weren't in on, and obviously Faye and Mike (being twins) had a close relationship the others would never fully understand. But if she had to choose one person who knew her better than anyone, it was Will. She loved her brother to pieces, but sometimes he could be a real asshole and usually when that happened, Will was the person she confided in.

And vice versa. For example, no-one else knew that Will was secretly terrified of spiders. Or that he had a crush on Sophia Preston in first grade. Or that he keeps a box of Reese's hidden in Castle Byers that he only ever shares with Faye. At their first sleepover after Will's dad left, he pretended he was okay to the others, but spent all night crying his eyes out on Faye's shoulder once they were asleep. She and Will told each other everything, no matter what. So why wouldn't he tell her what was wrong now?

Inexplicably, she thinks of Eleven. Faye wishes she was still around so that she could talk to her. Even though El never said very much, she always seemed to say the right thing when she did.

"Faye."

Faye drops her bag of candy.

"Faye."

That was Eleven's voice. She'd know it anywhere.

"Eleven?!" Faye cries, scanning up and down the sidewalk to pinpoint the source of the voice. There are a few Trick or Treating stragglers, but the street is mostly empty- Dustin, Lucas and Max being quite a ways ahead. Eleven is nowhere to be seen.

"Faye?" The others are running back towards her "What's wrong?" asks Lucas.

"I-I don't know," says Faye, her eyes still flitting to every dark corner and garden hedge to see if she can spot her. "I thought I heard Eleven's voice."

"Eleven?" Lucas questions, turning around to look too "Where?"

"Who's Eleven?" asks Max.

Ignoring the question, Faye shakes her head "I must have just imagined it."

"Are you sure?" Dustin presses.

"Where did it come from?" adds Lucas.

"Who's Eleven?!" Max repeats.

Faye loses her grip on her temper "It doesn't matter!"

The group stares at her, equal parts surprised and worried. Eventually Dustin- ever the peace keeper- says "Maybe we should just go home."

Faye nods, picking up her bag of candy and starting back up the

street.

They walk home mostly in silence. When Faye opens the front door, Mike runs downstairs to greet her. "Hey, how was Trick or Treating?"

Faye just shrugs, brushing past him to head upstairs. All she wants to do is go to bed and have this horrible day be over. But Mike has other ideas.

"Will just left, his mom came and got him. He said to tell you he's sorry about earlier and that he's not feeling well."

Faye frowns. Not feeling well? She'd seen Will when he wasn't feeling well before and it had never been like that, but frankly she's too tired to argue. "Whatever."

Mike's voice softens "Look, don't be mad at him okay? He's going through a lot."

"You think I don't know that?!" Faye snaps.

"I'm just saying!"

"Yeah well he's not the only one," Faye mutters under her breath, attempting to get past Mike again, but he isn't having it.

"What do you mean?"

Faye sighs "I thought I heard Eleven's voice tonight."

Mike stares at her intently "Where?"

"It wasn't her, must have just been in my head," Faye answers. "Was weird though."

Mike pauses a moment before he speaks "I thought I heard her last night, too."

Faye looks up "On the radio?"

Her brother nods. A tiny spark of hope flares in Faye's chest "You don't think there's a chance she's still out there?"

"No," Mike says after several moments. "We saw what happened...she's gone."

Faye knows her brother well enough to know when he's lying, but she also knows why. Mike desperately wants to believe Eleven is still out there, Faye knows he does, but there's a good chance she isn't. Building up hope only to have it torn down again just makes the pain of losing someone even worse. She knows that first-hand.

4. Oh God! He's slimy!

She intends go straight to her bedroom, but Faye's feet carry her down into the basement. She barely makes it to the bottom before she collapses, grabbing hold of the banister for support. The pain is unbearable. Her body feels like it's shutting down, like all of her organs are choking and her muscles seizing up. The tears streaming from her eyes are unlike any she's ever felt; they are burning hot and acidic, leaving a nasty sting in their wake.

Suddenly Mike is beside her, his arms pull her against him and he buries his face in her hair. The sobs wracking his body join her own and it is all either of them can do to sit there and cry for a very long time. The worst thing that could have possibly happened has happened. Faye's eyes are squeezed shut in an attempt to block out the image, but it's there, etched into her mind. Unrelenting. The ambulance. The police cars. The quarry. The orange stretcher with Will's body on it.

Faye doesn't know how much time has passed when she opens her eyes. She feels dazed, like she isn't really there. Like she left her soul behind at that quarry. Faye doesn't really know what a soul is, whether they are even real. But it seems to be the only accurate description of how she feels. Hollow. Cold. An empty shell. It occurs to her now why she came down to the basement. She feels closer to him here. How many thousands of hours did they spend together in this room. A room he will never be in again.

A tiny sob attracts her attention and Faye looks up. All at once, the pain gives way to fury. "You."

With a sudden burst of energy, Faye springs to her feet and marches over to where Eleven is shivering on the couch. "You lied! You're a liar!" Faye screams the words in her face, grabbing Eleven's shoulders and shaking them "You said he was alive, you liar! You liar! You liar!"

"Faye stop! Stop it! Please, Faye!" Mike is pulling her back, but Faye breaks out of his grip.

"Why are you helping her?! She told us he was alive, and he's not. He's dead!" Faye doubles over at the words. It's the first time she's actually said it out loud.

"I know, I know, but this won't bring him back" says Mike in a defeated voice. Unnoticed by the Wheelers, Eleven slips away to her makeshift bed under the table.

Faye clutches her waist, convinced she is literally holding herself together. Worried that if she lets go she will break completely, and might not be able to put herself back again. She glances at Mike who is watching her with a pained expression.

"What do we do now?" she breathes.

Mike shakes his head "I don't know."

The grating buzz of the radio tears through the room. It crackles in and out, straining to pick up a signal, and then they hear it.

"So you got to let me know."

Faye stops breathing.

"Should I stay or should I go?"

The twins look over and see Eleven huddled under the table holding Mike's radio, fresh blood seeping from her nostril. She stares at Faye imploringly.

"Will?!" Mike cries.

"Should I stay or should I go now?"

Mike has the radio out of Eleven's hand in a heartbeat "Will! Will! Are you there? Will, it's me Mike! Will!"

The signal hisses and Mike tries again, desperately calling Will's name over and over, but there's no response. With a final screech, the connection dissolves into silence.

Faye is rooted to the spot. She refuses to believe what she has just heard.

"Was that-" Mike stutters.

"Will," Eleven confirms.

Mike's words are cautiously hopeful "He-he's alive?"

Eleven nods.

A scoff rips from Faye's throat. She pierces Eleven with a glare and when she speaks, her voice is venom "Why should we believe you?"

The short-haired girl gets to her feet and approaches Faye, as Mike watches nervously in the background. Eleven looks her directly in the eye, wide and unblinking "Friends don't lie."

Faye holds her gaze. She waits for the anger to bite again, the urge to shove Eleven away and scream at her. But it doesn't come. The hazel eyes before her are frightened, pained and exhausted, but they are not deceitful. Unwittingly, Faye finds herself trusting them. And that means...it's true.

Will is alive.

The next day at school, Will is waiting for her on the steps.

"Hey," he says when she approaches.

"Hey," Faye answers.

Will looks guilty when he speaks "I'm really sorry about yesterday. I didn't mean to snap at you, I just felt really sick all of a sudden and I didn't want you to see me throw up."

Faye considers this "Why didn't you just say that?"

"I don't know, I'm sorry."

There's something about Will's explanation that doesn't seem right, but he does sound genuinely apologetic and he's giving Faye the puppy dog face, so she relents.

"Okay."

Will looks quietly hopeful "So we're okay?"

Faye nods "Yeah, we're okay."

A relieved smile spreads across Will's face and he reaches into his

backpack to pull out a bulging plastic bag. "Here," he hands it to Faye.

"What's this?"

"It's all the Reese's from my Halloween candy. You have them."

Faye looks at him "But they're your favorite."

"They're your favorite too," Will's smile morphs into his rarely-seen wolfish grin "Plus, if the apology didn't work I had to have a backup, right?"

This draws a laugh from Faye "Oh I see, so you were going to bribe me?"

Will's grin widens "If that's what it took."

Faye shoves his shoulder, still laughing, just as the bell rings for class.

Uncharacteristically, Dustin bursts into Mr. Clarke's lesson 10 minutes late. He's usually the first one there. He then proceeds to whisper urgently that they all need to meet in the AV room after school as he has something "unbelievable" to show them. So at 3PM the group, plus Max, find themselves locked in the AV room hovering over Dustin's *Ghostbusters* trap.

"His name is D'artagnan," says Dustin proudly. D'artagnan appears to be a bizarre slug-like lizard. Faye has never seen anything like it before. Apparently Dustin found him in his trash the previous night and decided to keep him as a pet, whatever he is "Cute right?"

Mike raises his eyebrows "D'artagnan?"

"Dart for short," Dustin clarifies.

"And he was in your trash?" asks Max.

Dustin nods "Foraging for food. You wanna hold him?"

Max quickly shakes her head, but Dustin is already passing the creature to her. "Oh God, he's slimy!" she exclaims, tipping Dart into

Lucas' hands.

Dart is quickly passed around the group, all of whom are repulsed by him. His skin- which is surprisingly cold- sticks to Faye's hand and oozes a sticky, snot-like mucus. She shudders and hurriedly gives Dart to Mike, wiping the slime off on her pant leg.

"He could be poisonous you know!" Faye asserts.

Lucas points at Dustin accusingly "If I start coming out in a rash, you are dead meat!"

Ignoring them, Dustin produces a stack of library books from his backpack and insists that he's discovered a new species. Faye wrinkles her nose at Dart- whatever he is, she doesn't like him. Out of the corner of her eye she notices Will staring at Dart intently, but not in a repulsed way. Almost like he's scared of him. Eventually, they decide to show Dart to Mr. Clarke and file out of the AV room.

"Faye?" says Will as they're walking down the hall.

Faye turns around "Yeah?"

Will looks nervous and lowers his voice "I don't think Dart is a new species."

"What do you mean?"

There is a pause before Will answers "I think he's from the Upside Down."

A chill steals through her "What?"

Will swallows thickly "I saw something like him last year, only it didn't have a tail. Then yesterday I heard..."

"Heard what?" Faye presses.

Her question goes unanswered "The point is I don't think we should be showing him to Mr. Clarke."

Will's expression is deadly serious and his voice has this conviction to

it that Faye has never heard before. She knows he's not messing around. The two of them sprint down the hall after the others, praying they're not too late. Faye rounds the corner and spots them about to knock on Mr. Clarke's door.

"Stop!"

Dustin, Lucas, Mike and Max all turn to look at her, but before they can ask questions Faye snatches the trap out of Dustin's hands. Dart squeals in protest at the sudden movement.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Dustin exclaims, attempting to grab it back.

Faye flinches away from him "We can't show him to Mr. Clarke."

Dustin frowns "What are you talking about?"

"Just trust me," Faye insists. The metal box begins to shake and Dart's screams grow louder.

Dustin tries to wrestle it out of Faye's arms "Give him back! He's scared!"

"Dustin stop!" Faye snaps, twisting her body away from him.

"Let go of her!" Will shouts, trying to shove Dustin off.

Faye holds on as hard as she can, but Dustin is stronger than her. Eventually, he manages to pry it out of her hands, but in the commotion the trap springs open and Dart leaps out. He lands on the floor with a splat and quickly scampers away, trailing droplets of slime.

"Son of a bitch!" Dustin yells. He glares at Faye "What the hell is your problem?!"

A retort is on the tip of Faye's tongue, but she is aware they are in the middle of a school corridor- not to mention in front of Max. She glances at Will, who answers for her. "We have to find him before someone else does."

"Can someone please tell me what's going on here?" Lucas asks.

The group split up to look for Dart. Faye volunteers herself and Max to search the West side of the building, knowing this will enable Will to explain to the others what's going on. Will nods at her and the boys disappear down the hall- with Dustin shooting Faye a dirty look as he passes.

Once they're alone, Max says "No offense, but you guys are totally crazy."

"You have no idea," Faye answers.

The two girls start searching the West-side classrooms; pulling open every drawer, looking under every desk and tipping out every trash can. As they hunt for Dart, a sinister feeling envelopes Faye. Like the kind you get when you're alone in the house and you hear a noise. You know something bad is going to happen, but you don't know exactly what or when. And that isn't all. In her urgency to stop Dustin showing Dart to Mr. Clarke, Faye had overlooked Will's evasiveness, but as she plays the conversation over in her head she realizes he never said *where* he saw Dart last year. At first she assumed it was the Upside Down, but he had started to say something about yesterday then stopped himself. Could that have been what triggered his fit? And if so, why didn't he say anything?

"Are you okay?"

Faye is pulled from her thoughts "Huh?"

"You haven't said a word in like a half hour," Max points out.

"Sorry," Faye mumbles, focusing on the janitor's closet she is rifling through.

Max sighs "Look, there's clearly stuff going on that I don't know about, but you can trust me. Honest."

Faye stays silent. It's not that they don't trust Max (apart from Mike, for some reason), it's that they *can't* tell her anything. They'd get into so much trouble, not to mention put her in danger.

"It's about Will isn't it?" Max continues "Lucas told me about him going missing last year. Is that why he freaked out yesterday? Did he have some sort of panic attack?"

"I really can't talk about it."

Max rolls her eyes "Come on, you gotta give me something," she pauses before adding "Can you at least tell me why your brother hates me so much?"

Faye laughs humorlessly "I honestly don't know. You'll have to ask him."

Speak of the devil, Mike suddenly appears at the opposite end of the hall and heads into the gym. A determined expression spreads across Max's face "Fine, I will."

With that, she marches off in pursuit of Mike. Faye doesn't bother trying to stop her.

By now, Faye must have searched a dozen rooms in the school and Dart is still nowhere to be found. *Where are you, you little bastard?* she wonders. Faye thinks hard, trying to narrow down the places he could be. He doesn't like light or heat, so it's unlikely he went outside. Where in the school is it dark and cold? Suddenly it clicks. The bathroom.

Faye is about to head down the hall when what she sees stops her cold. There is a figure standing outside the doors to the gym, clad in a dark jacket and light blue jeans. From this angle, the person's mess of unkempt brown hair obscures most of their face, but there's just something about the way they stand that is profoundly familiar. *No. It can't be.*

"Eleven?"

The figure dips their head and glimpses in Faye's direction through the curtain of hair. Faye still can't make out their face. Then without warning the figure wheels around and walks in the opposite direction.

"Wait!" Faye calls, running after them.

She skids around the corner just in time to catch sight of the blue jeans disappearing down another corridor. Faye gives chase, seeming to be just one step behind the figure at every turn. It almost feels like they *want* Faye to follow them. After a hot pursuit across the length of the school, Faye is panting hard and jumps down a small flight of steps to see the figure slipping out of the main doors. She goes to follow, but a voice suddenly calls out from behind her.

"Faye!" Mike cries "Have you seen Will?!"

Faye doesn't like the panic in Mike's tone "I thought he was with you guys?"

The sound of footsteps thunders towards them and a moment later Lucas barrels around the corner "He's in the field! There's something really wrong."

The boys run off immediately, but for a brief moment Faye is torn. Something is telling her she should follow the figure. Like she's somehow drawn to them. What if it really is Eleven? What if she's come back and she needs Faye's help? But Lucas said something is "really wrong." If something is really wrong with Will, then he needs her. This thought makes up her mind and Faye sprints after Lucas and Mike.

5. No more secrets

"WILL!"

Faye's feet propel her to the center of the field where Will is standing motionless, encircled by the others. She elbows them out of the way and latches her hands onto Will's shoulders.

"Will?! Will it's me, can you hear me?"

His eyes are closed and his arms hang limply at his sides. Faye has a horrible flashback to the body pulled out of the quarry last year. She grips his shoulders tighter.

"Will please! Will it's me, say something! Wake up!"

Mike shakes his head "We should call his mom!"

"Or an ambulance!" adds Lucas.

Faye doesn't know what to do. She feels helpless. Will's eyelids are fluttering wildly, the way people's do when they're having a bad dream. It's almost like he's sleepwalking. Even through his shirt, Faye can feel the cold emanating from Will's body. This doesn't make any sense, it's not cold outside at all. In desperation, Faye places her hands either side of Will's face and she gasps. His skin is ice.

"Go get help!" Faye demands. Several pairs of footsteps race away, but all of a sudden Faye feels like she can't move. As if her hands are welded to Will's face, the way ice cubes stick to your skin when you take them out of the freezer. The cold seeps through her body inch by inch; slithering down her arms and into her chest like it knows where it's going. Like it has a mind.

Her entire body is shivering, but she can't let go. Faye squeezes her eyes shut-

When she opens them again, all she can see is blackness. The field is gone. Will is gone. There is nothing but a blank void stretching in every direction. And then she hears a sound behind her, somewhere between a roar and a scream. The hairs on the back of her neck shoot

up. Faye turns around and her heart stops.

Will is standing a few feet away, engulfed in a whirlwind of black smoke. At first it appears to be streaming out of him, but to her horror Faye realizes it's not. It's going *into* him. His eyes. His ears. His mouth. The smoke swarms him like a plague of flies, forcing its way inside his body.

Faye wants to scream, but she can't make any sound come out. She can only stand there, watching as Will is eaten alive-

"WILL!"

Her eyes snap open and stare directly into Will's. The smoke is gone and they're back in the field, Faye still clinging to his face. She promptly lets go and stumbles backwards, feeling like she might pass out. Suddenly Ms. Byers is there and throws her arms around Will who is wide-eyed and trembling, as is Faye. She is vaguely aware of a conversation going on around her, but Faye can't make out the words. Her mind is refusing to process what just happened. Something grabs her arm.

"Hey, you're bleeding."

Mike is staring at her with a worried expression. Faye reaches up to her nose and her fingers come away bloody.

Oblivious to Mike's comment, Ms. Byers puts an arm around Will's shoulders and leads him away. "I'm gonna get him home."

It takes Faye a few seconds to realize a tissue is being waved at her. "Here."

Faye takes the tissue from Max and holds it to her nose, trying to keep her hand steady.

"What the hell just happened?" asks Dustin, staring after Will.

"I don't know, but it's starting to freak me the fuck out," Lucas answers.

Mike is still looking at her "Are you sure you're okay? You've gone all

pale."

Faye's mouth is pursed shut, worried that if she opens it she'll let out the scream lodged in her throat. She manages to say "I just wanna go home," before having to bite down on her lip and walk away.

As soon as they get back, Faye informs her mom that she's not feeling well and heads straight up to her room. Mike goes to follow her, but is called back down because dinner is ready- which Faye is grateful for. Right now she doesn't feel like she can speak to anyone, not even Mike. She closes the door to their bedroom and sits down at her desk, grabbing the first clean piece of paper she touches. Faye has to get the image out of her head. She drags the black pencil violently back and forth across the page, smudging the edges with her fingertip, desperate to recreate what she saw.

Once finished, Faye picks up the drawing and stares at it, willing it to give her some answers. Nothing like that had ever happened to her before. Faye had heard about people having hallucinations, but her mom told her those people were crazy and usually ended up in an asylum. Besides, a hallucination isn't real; it only happens inside your head. Faye knew this was real. She'd felt the cold spreading through her body. She'd seen that...that thing. Even her imagination couldn't have made that up.

A thought occurs to her and Faye feels a sense of dread. From what little Will had said about the Upside Down, it was a cold, dark place full of monsters. What if she'd somehow gone to the Upside Down? Faye frowns. She couldn't have, you have to go through the gate to get there- you don't just fall in accidentally. And even if she did, how did she then end up back on the field? Faye cradles her head in her hands, overwhelmed by all the questions. There is only one person who can answer them. Will. She so badly wants to call the Byers' house, but their phones are all tapped and the men from Hawkins Lab would be on the doorstep in a hot minute if they heard her discussing the Upside Down. That and they'd probably put her and Will in straitjackets.

A little while later Faye hears footsteps coming upstairs, but by the time they enter the room she is in bed pretending to be asleep- the drawing slotted under her pillow. Faye stays like this all night;

staring at the wall, fighting the urge to sleep for fear she will be back in that place. She just hopes and prays Will will be there tomorrow.

The next morning, Faye's heart sinks when she arrives at school and spots Lucas and Max standing outside the building, but no sign of Will. Her disappointment is suddenly replaced by alarm when Lucas promptly climbs into the garbage next to them and begins tossing out bags of trash.

"What are you doing?" Faye asks as her and Mike approach.

"What do you think? We're looking for Dart," Max answers.

In all the commotion, Faye had completely forgotten about Dart. Just as Lucas jumps back out of the garbage, Dustin appears around the corner.

"Well well well, look who finally decided to show up. After I drew the short straw. Real convenient," Lucas huffs.

Max wrinkles her nose at him "You stink."

"Where's Will?" Dustin asks.

"He'll be here," says Mike.

Unfortunately, when the bell rings a few minutes later Will is nowhere to be seen. Faye spends the entire morning staring out of the window, not taking in a single word Mr. Clarke is saying. The second the clock strikes lunchtime, she is out of her seat and at the payphone dialing Will's number. It rings several times, but no-one picks up. Frustrated, Faye replaces the receiver and turns around to see Mike standing behind her.

"Alright, what's going on?"

Faye shrugs at him "What do you mean?"

"You were tossing and turning all night, you've been quiet all day and you didn't answer a single question in Mr. Clarke's class," Mike clarifies.

"It's nothing, I'm fine-"

"Don't lie to me," Mike cuts her off.

"Well you lied to me first!" Faye snaps

Mike scowls "About what?"

"Halloween? 'Will wasn't feeling well'? Bullshit!"

Guilt spreads across Mike's face "I had to say that."

"Why?"

"Because Will asked me to! He didn't want everyone knowing!"

"Knowing what?!"

Mike clasps his hands over his face "I can't tell you, I promised!"

There is a brief pause before Faye states "Fine, I'll ask him myself."

The afternoon drags at an achingly slow pace, to the point where Faye is told off by Mr. Clarke for tapping her fingers on the desk impatiently. When 3PM finally rolls around, Mike instructs the others to continue looking for Dart while he and Faye set off for Will's house. Normally Mike is the fastest biker, but today Faye is giving him a run for his money. In no time, they are propping their bikes against Will's porch and knocking on the front door.

A lock clicks and Ms. Byers appears, looking exhausted "Oh hey guys."

"Is Will here?" Mike asks.

Ms. Byers glances over her shoulder "You know, now is really not a good time."

"Is he okay?" Mike presses.

Will's mom shuts the door and steps out onto the porch "You know he's just really not feeling well, he's laying down. I'll tell him you came over."

She puts a hand on both of her backs in an attempt to turn them away, but Faye doesn't move "I know about the monster."

Mike and Ms. Byers turn to her. "I need to see him," she states.

Whether it's the look on Faye's face or the tone of her voice, Ms. Byers nods and leads them inside. Almost every inch of the living room is covered in paper; Faye recognizes them immediately as Will's drawings, stretching out like vines on a tree. It appears to be some kind of giant tunnel network. Ms. Byers leads them through to Will's room and raps her knuckles against the door.

"Will? Faye and Mike are here to see you."

The door creaks open and reveals Will, still in his pajamas, looking worse than Faye has ever seen him. There are dark circles under his eyes and his shirt is damp with sweat. He appears to have had even less sleep than Faye.

"I'll be in the living room if you need me," Ms. Byers says, disappearing down the hall.

Will opens the door for them to enter, but Faye blocks Mike's path "Give me a minute."

Mike doesn't protest. Faye shuts the door and turns to face Will. He somehow appears simultaneously older and younger; his stance is that of a child, but his face has this haunted look to it. Like he's seen things no-one his age should ever have to see.

"I'm sorry," are the first words out of his mouth.

"Sorry?"

"I lied to you about Halloween. I wasn't sick."

Faye nods "I know."

Will's expression is pained "I don't know what happened. One minute I was fine then the next I saw this...this *thing*."

Faye's heartbeat quickens "Thing?"

"Yeah, like a shadow but bigger and angrier," Will pauses before adding "I saw it that night at the arcade too."

"And yesterday on the field?" Faye queries.

What little color there is in Will's face drains away "Yes, but yesterday it was different. It was..."

Faye unzips her backpack and hands Will her drawing "Like this?"

Will unfolds it and his eyes widen "How did you know?"

"I saw it," says Faye in a quivering voice. She then proceeds to explain to Will what happened on the field; the cold, the dark place, the monster. Every detail she can remember. Will doesn't interrupt once. When Faye has finished, she waits nervously for his response.

"I don't understand," Will says eventually "Dr. Owens says my episodes are flashbacks. Mom thinks they're more like a connection between me and the Upside Down, but neither of those explain how you saw it."

Faye sighs "Well, if you can't tell me then no-one can."

A few moments pass in silence as the two of them sit on the edge of Will's bed. Faye feels the mattress dip as he turns towards her.

"I wanted to tell you, more than anyone."

Faye meets Will's eyes, their knees lightly brushing against each other now that he's facing her. Will continues, "When I started having the episodes, you were the first person I wanted to talk to, but I was scared."

"Of the monster?"

"Not of the monster, of you."

Faye frowns "Me?"

Will speaks in a quiet voice "Of the way it would make you see me. You were the only person who never made me feel like a freak, the

only person I could just be myself around. I didn't want that to change. Everyone else was treating me differently; mom, Jonathan, Mike..." he dips his head "...but I couldn't stand the thought of you treating me differently. So I pretended everything was okay so that we could just be normal. Just be us."

Faye is completely taken aback. She had no idea all of this was going through Will's head. He'd always been an over-thinker, but she didn't realize it went quite this deep. More importantly, she is touched her opinion means so much to him. As his does to her. Faye places her hand over Will's.

"Hey," Will looks up, half nervous and half embarrassed "I would never *ever* treat you differently. No matter what you told me. You're my best friend, got it?"

For the first time that day, Will smiles "Got it."

Faye isn't sure which of them moves in for the hug first, but she welcomes it. Her hand rubs Will's back and he relaxes against her, clearly relieved he has gotten everything off his chest.

"No more secrets?" Faye clarifies.

Will nods into her shoulder "No more secrets."

6. If I could read minds I'd know about it

Faye creeps upstairs, taking care to skip the third step from the top which always squeaks. Nancy has gone shopping with Barb, which means she won't be back for hours, and the boys are engrossed in D&D in the basement. Faye had feigned having a headache and claimed she was going to her room to lie down, when in actual fact she tiptoes across the hall to Nancy's room.

Slowly turning the handle, Faye pushes the door open and slips inside. It's been a while since she was in here, as Nancy has recently become weird about privacy- yelling at anyone who crosses the threshold without having been expressly invited. Probably because she spends most of her time on the phone to Barb talking about boys. Faye shudders. Gross.

Not wanting to linger too long in case she is caught, Faye goes straight for the objective. Nancy's dresser- more specifically, her makeup. Faye wasn't expecting so much of it. Almost the entire surface is covered in lipsticks, mascaras, nail polishes and numerous other products she can't identify. She only wants to try it. To see what it looks like. Besides, it's not stealing if she doesn't remove anything from the room, right?

It's not as if Faye has any other option. All of her friends are boys and if she goes to her mom she'll get the dreaded "becoming a woman" talk. Nancy warned her about it years ago and Faye is making it her mission to avoid the subject for all eternity. She picks up a bottle of mascara and pulls out the brush with a pop, but every time she attempts to apply it her eyes instinctively flinch shut. Next she tries blusher powder, but it's way too dark on her cheeks and makes her look like a porcelain doll. Rubbing the powder off on her sleeve, Faye spots a small pink container with the word 'Bubblegum' in glittery print. She reaches for it and realizes it is Bubblegum lipgloss.

Faye unscrews the cap and carefully sweeps a coat of the shimmering liquid over her lips, using Nancy's mirror as a guide. It's a little messy, but she likes the subtle sheen of the color and the sweet, sugary scent. Faye looks at her reflection and turns her head from side to side, watching the light bouncing off her lips-

"Faye?"

She spins around and sees Will standing in the doorway. She'd been so busy admiring the lipgloss that she hadn't spotted him in the mirror. Faye purses her lips and clutches the pink container behind her back. "What do you want?"

Will steps into the room "You said you weren't feeling well so I came to check you were okay," as he gets closer, his green eyes narrow "Are you wearing makeup?"

"No," Faye answers. Will just looks at her and eventually Faye sighs and turns around "Go on, laugh."

"Why would I laugh?" asks Will.

"Because I'm doing girl stuff and you all think girl stuff is stupid, so just get it over with," Faye mutters, waiting to hear the sound of Will's sniggers. They don't come.

"Just because we don't like girl stuff doesn't mean you can't. You are a girl, after all."

Faye peers over her shoulder "You don't think it's stupid?"

Will shakes his head, and then he adds "You look pretty."

Both of their faces flush and Faye turns back around to face him. For a moment neither of them seems to know what to say, then Will quickly walks out of the room, mumbling "I'd better get back."

Faye stands there, cheeks burning, as Will's footsteps hurry down the stairs. That was the first time anyone had called her pretty.

When Faye finishes going over her story for Mike and Ms. Byers, their mouths are agape. Ms. Byers jumps to her feet and heads to the telephone "We need to tell Hopper about this."

Mike's eyes flit between Faye and Will "So you saw the now memory, as it was happening?"

Faye nods "When I put my hands on Will's face."

There is a pause before Mike speaks again "Do you...do you think you

read his mind?"

"What?!" Faye exclaims "That's ridiculous!"

"It makes sense!" Mike counters "How else could you have seen it when you haven't been to the Upside Down?"

Faye can't believe he is wasting time with such stupid suggestions "Mike this isn't a superhero movie."

"Eleven could do things with her mind," Mike points out.

"Because she was locked in a lab and tortured her entire life!"

"No," says Mike "She was locked in a lab and tortured *because* she could do things with her mind, not the other way around."

Faye shakes her head "Do you not think if I could read minds I would know about it?!"

"Not necessarily."

Mike gets up and moves to sit on the couch next to Will, then without warning he places his hands on Will's face.

"Um, what are you doing?" Will asks, leaning away from him.

"Think of a color."

"Oh my God," Faye buries her face in her palms.

Will is staring at Mike like he's lost his mind, but nonetheless he humors him "Okay."

Mike closes his eyes and concentrates "Red?"

"No," says Will.

Sitting back, he gestures to Faye "Now you try."

"I am literally embarrassed to be related to you right now," Faye glares.

"Just shutup and do it!" Mike snaps.

Sighing, Faye knows from experience the easiest way to deal with Mike when he gets an idea in his head is to just go along with it. She turns to Will, who is seated between her and Mike.

"Can I?" she asks.

"Yeah, sure," Will answers. Faye reaches up and tries to position her hands in the same place they were last time. Only now Will is watching her; his eyes are open and his skin is warm rather than cold- hot even. They have never been this close to each other. Faye picks out shades of green in Will's eyes she never knew were there, feels his breath as he exhales nervously.

"Are you thinking of a color?" Mike asks, interrupting her thoughts.

"Um, yeah," Will affirms.

Following Mike's example, Faye closes her eyes and empties her mind. In the movies, whenever someone can read minds it's always easy. People's thoughts jump out at them and play aloud like a radio. Nothing like this happens. For a few seconds, nothing happens at all, then Faye is suddenly aware of a single word. She doesn't hear it exactly, it just pops into her head. Like when you remember a random fact or figure you thought you'd forgotten.

"Blue."

Faye opens her eyes and Will's expression is one of surprise "Yeah."

"See!" Mike shouts in triumph.

"It was a fluke, it's just the first color I thought of!"

"Fine, do it again," Mike challenges.

They repeat the process a further three times, and each of Faye's guesses are correct. Mike then says she should try it on him, just to compare, which she does- the result is the same. Faye guesses colors, numbers, names- everything. By the time, she gives the tenth right answer in a row, Faye is beginning to freak out.

"Okay, no clues this time," says Mike "What am I thinking?"

Faye waits for the answer to come to her as it has before, but it doesn't. It appears her guessing streak has run out. She knew this was stupid.

"I don't know."

Mike sighs and leans out of Faye's hold.

"Maybe it only works if the person is thinking of a specific thing?" Will suggests.

"Or maybe she just needs more practise," says Mike, sounding excited.

Faye rolls her eyes "Or maybe I'm just really good at guessing."

"Why are you being such a douche?" Mike accuses "Do you not realize how cool this is?"

"It's not cool, it's insane!" Faye snaps.

Ms. Byers suddenly appears in the doorway "What's going on?"

"Nothing," Faye, Mike and Will chant in unison.

Ms. Byers fixes them with a scrutinizing stare "Okay, well you'd better finish up the 'nothing' because it's time for bed."

Faye and Mike make up their beds on Will's floor, Ms. Byers having agreed to them staying over. When Faye goes to the bathroom, she notices her nose is bleeding again, but wipes the blood away and thinks nothing of it. Returning to Will's room, Faye sees an old blue sweater on top of her pillow and smiles. The sweater had once been Jonathan's, then passed to Will when he grew out of it and hung at the back of his closet until Faye discovered it one day when she was cold. Will said she could wear it and it had become a sort of tradition ever since; whenever Faye sleeps at Will's house, she gets the sweater. By now it has a few holes and the logo is faded from so many washes, but it's soft and warm and familiar. Faye can't quite describe the scent of it- it's just sort of, Will.

Ms. Byers bids them goodnight and turns the light off. They lay awake chatting for a while, mostly about everything that's happened the past few days- wondering whether the others found Dart yet. Gradually, the conversation eases off into silence. Faye can tell from Mike's breathing that he's asleep; she knows to listen out for the tell-tale hitches in his breath from years of late night reading and drawing (he gets very angry if she turns the light on while he's still awake). However, she's pretty sure Will isn't asleep yet. As if on cue, he says quietly "Faye?"

"Yeah?"

"You think things will ever be normal again?"

Faye considers this question, ultimately realizing "No, probably not."

She hears Will's sheets rustling as changes position "I'm sorry I got us into this."

"What?"

"If the Demogorgon didn't get me, none of this would be happening."

"Oh no you don't," Faye interrupts "Don't even try to blame this on yourself."

Will sighs "But it's true."

Faye sits up "If it didn't get you, it would have got someone else. This was gonna happen either way. "

There is no response to this so Faye lays back down, hoping Will believes her.

"Thanks for the sweater," she adds.

Faye can hear the smirk in Will's voice when he replies "You don't have to be a mind reader to figure that out."

She tries so hard not to laugh, but it's no use "Damn you Byers."

Faye doesn't remember falling asleep, but the next thing she knows

it's light outside. Yawning and stretching, she burrows deeper into the covers, not quite ready to get up. Ever since baby Holly was born, Faye is used to being woken up at ungodly hours- and even now that her little sister has grown out of the crying and screaming phase, her body is accustomed to rising early. Faye is just dozing off again when she hears a gasp and Will suddenly sits bolt upright.

"Will?" Faye glances up at him. He's drenched in sweat "What's wrong?"

"Hopper," Will breathes "He's in trouble."

Faye immediately wakes Mike and the three of them head into the living room to inform Will's mom. She asks Will what he saw, but Will doesn't seem to be able to explain it. He only says that Hopper "is going to die." Panicked, Ms. Byers grabs an old sheet of Christmas wrapping from the cupboard (Will having used all the regular paper) and tells him to draw it instead. Will obliges, scribbling a nondescript area of the tunnels and handing it over. Faye, Mike and Ms. Byers go into the living room to locate the area. It's not an easy task; all of the drawings look virtually the same and there's so many of them.

"Here!" Mike shouts.

Faye and Ms. Byers run over to where Mike is pointing.

"So Hopper is here," Ms. Byers states, placing Will's new drawing over the existing one.

"Yeah, now we just need to find out where here is," adds Mike.

"Did Hopper say anything before he left?" Faye asks.

Ms. Byers hums in thought "Something about vines?"

The sound of a car pulling up raises their hopes and they run over to the window, but it's just Bob- Ms. Byers' boyfriend.

"Wait here," she instructs, heading out to greet him.

Faye and Mike peek through the curtains, waiting for Ms. Byers to turn him away. To their surprise, she invites him in instead.

"What is she doing?" Mike exclaims. "He can't see all this!"

Ms. Byers steps through the front door with Bob in tow "Bob this is Faye and Mike, Will's friends."

Bob smiles widely "Hey guys, nice to meet you. Wow, you two could be twins!"

"Um, we are," says Faye.

"Oh," Bob replies "That explains it then."

At that moment, Will emerges from his room- just as Bob notices the drawings. Ms. Byers explains that they need his help, but he's not allowed to ask any questions. Faye doesn't see how Bob will be able to help, especially if he doesn't understand what's going on. It turns out she couldn't be more wrong. Initially, Bob is overwhelmed, but in a matter of minutes he is identifying different places in Hawkins from Will's drawings and realizes the entire thing is a map. If the drawings are a map, then the only thing they have to do to find Hopper is to figure out where on the map he is.

The group spends the next hour assisting Bob to plot various locations, attempting to narrow down Hopper's whereabouts as much as possible. Eventually, Bob pinpoints the area Will drew as about a half mile Southeast of Danford. Without a second's hesitation, they run outside and get into Ms. Byers' car. Danford is a bit of a drive, so Faye only hopes they're not too late.

Unfortunately, the journey takes even longer than Faye anticipated- even with Ms. Byers driving faster than she should. By the time they are getting close, it's almost dusk. Faye and Mike strain their eyes out of the back windows, trying to spot anything unusual, but it's just empty fields either side of the road.

As Bob and Ms. Byers start bickering about what to do, Will suddenly shouts out "Turn right!"

"What?" his mom asks.

"I saw him."

"Where?"

"Not here, in my now memories," Will clarifies.

Bob turns around in his seat "In your what?"

"Turn right!" Will demands.

Faye is thrown against the window as the car veers sharply to the right and into the field. She screams in alarm as they crash through several hay-bales and knock over a wooden sign before Ms. Byers slams the breaks on. When Faye catches her breath, she looks up and sees that they are parked behind Hopper's cruiser.

Author's note: Hello lovely readers! I hope you're enjoying the story. I just wanted to ask whether people think the chapters are too long? I am aware each one is like a mini essay and I don't want them to be a chore to get through. If you have any thoughts on this please let me know and I am happy to amend the word count accordingly. I won't cut anything out, I'll just post shorter chapters. Thank you!

7. You won't save him

"Stay here!" Ms. Byers orders, getting out of the car with Bob.

Will panics "No no mom mom it's not safe-"

"That's why I need you to stay here! *Stay here!*" Ms. Byers insists, slamming the door and disappearing around Hopper's cruiser.

Faye, Mike and Will sit nervously, hearing Ms. Byers and Bob calling Hopper's name. Then everything goes quiet.

Mike shakes his head "They shouldn't be out there on their own."

The three of them take one look at each other and get out of the car, disregarding Ms. Byers' warning. They pass Hopper's cruiser and come across a giant hole in the ground- at least twenty feet across- which appears to have been freshly dug. There is a muddied shovel laying a few feet away, but no sign of Will's mom or Bob.

"They must have gone down after Hopper," Faye reasons.

"Do you see anything in your now memories?" Mike asks, turning to Will.

Will shakes his head. Out of the corner of her eye, Faye spots something incredibly peculiar. Will is smiling. No, smiling isn't the right word. He's *grinning*. It looks like he's pleased about something. Faye narrows her eyes. What could Will have to be grinning about? His mom is down there, unarmed and unprotected, walking straight towards whatever it is that's trying to kill Hopper.

Suddenly, a thought occurs to Faye that makes her blood run cold. What if Will's now memories aren't just him seeing what the monster sees...what if the monster is controlling him? *Possessing* him. That would explain all the black smoke flooding into him on the field. Why his skin was freezing to touch. She peers closer and realizes there is something wrong with Will's eyes too; they are dark, almost brown- not their usual green. Faye finds herself shaking. What if this whole thing is a trap?

She can only think of one thing that might reveal the truth. Faye marches over to Will and before he can say a word her hands are on his face and her eyes squeeze shut.

She is somewhere dark. Not the same place as before, somewhere underground. The tunnels from Will's drawings- it has to be. Faye's head spins as the passageway zooms around her, like she's being propelled through it. It splits off in so many directions, chopping and changing every few seconds, until finally she sees Ms. Byers and Bob. Faye calls out to them, but they don't hear her. And then all of a sudden a pair of thick vines, dripping with black slime, rise up and clamp around their necks. Ms. Byers and Bob are yanked to the ground where more vines slither their way over the bodies, until only two pairs of terrified eyes are visible.

"GET OFF ME!"

The vision disappears and Faye is shoved away. Will's expression is livid- only she now knows it isn't really Will.

"What the hell's going on?" Mike asks.

Faye opens her mouth to speak but is suddenly blinded by a beam of intense light. Seconds later it is accompanied by the sound of sirens as several white vans pull up beside them. Faye recognizes the Hawkins Lab branding immediately. At least a dozen men in white hazard suits file out of the vehicles and begin swarming the entrance to the tunnel.

"Stay back," one of them orders.

Faye, Mike and Will retreat a few paces and watch as the men jump down one by one. They all seem to be carrying some sort of weapon. Faye glances at Will who is no longer grinning, but still has a shadowy tint in his eyes. There's no way she can say anything now, not with all these people around.

Then entirely without warning, Will clutches his stomach and collapses.

"Will!" Mike yells, bending down to his level "Will what's wrong?"

Faye watches in horror as Will convulses uncontrollably, grunting and moaning in pain. She doesn't know whether it's the monster in pain or Will in pain, but either way she is powerless to stop it. Suddenly, Will flips over and a scream rips from Faye's throat. Will's eyes are rolled back into his head and his mouth is hanging open at a grotesque angle. A high-pitched squeal pierces her eardrums as Will's entire body writhes and jerks in a hideous fashion. He doesn't look like Will at all. He looks like a demon. Mike reaches out to steady her and Faye buries her face in his shoulder, unable to watch.

The next few hours are a blur.

Faye remembers seeing Ms. Byers, Bob and Hopper all emerge from the tunnel- shaken but alive. After that everything goes blank. As if it were too horrible for her brain to process. She vaguely recalls being in an ambulance, people in medical uniforms asking her questions, and hearing screaming. A lot of screaming. Mike doesn't let go of her the whole time, which is good because Faye is certain he is the only thing holding her up.

When consciousness finally returns to her, Faye opens her eyes and finds herself in a hospital room. Mike is asleep in the adjacent chair, situated at Will's bedside. It takes a few moments for it all to sink in, for the memories to refine into clarity. Once they do, Faye is on her feet and looking down at Will. He too is asleep, looks peaceful even- a stark comparison to the last time she saw him. Faye shudders at the image. She places her hand over Will's.

"I know you're in there," she whispers "I'm gonna get you out, I promise."

The door opens and Ms. Byers enters, with Bob following behind.

"Hey sweetie," she says, smiling at Faye "Are you okay?"

Bob tilts his head at her "Think you had a nosebleed while you were asleep, kiddo."

Faye wipes off the dried blood on her sleeve and glares at it. This is her third nosebleed in under a week. She hasn't had a single one in years, so why all of a sudden is she getting so many? Adding this to

her list of things to worry about later, Faye glances over her shoulder to make sure Will is still asleep and lowers her voice.

"I need to tell you something."

"What is it?" Ms. Byers asks, looking concerned.

Faye swallows "I saw something last night, in Will's mind."

"In Will's mind?" Ms. Byers repeats.

"I really can't explain it, but whenever Will is having an episode...I can see it. But that's not important right now," Faye insists, ignoring the wide-eyed expressions on their faces. "I think the monster is controlling him, making him say things. Last night, I saw those vines attack you both. I think that's what it was planning to do, that's why it made Will lure you there."

Ms. Byers seems to be at a loss for words. Bob is just staring at her "Are you telling us that you can read minds?"

Faye rolls her eyes "No! I-I mean I don't know, maybe. Sort of. But like I said that doesn't matter! What matters is we need to get that thing out of him!"

"Mom?"

They turn around and see Will sitting up in the bed. Ms. Byers rushes to his side. "Hey sweetie, how you feeling? You okay?"

Faye examines him from a distance. His eyes are green again, so it appears to really be Will. However, she doesn't trust that thing. She knows it's still in there, dormant, waiting. Her fears are elevated when Will doesn't seem to remember who Bob is. A surge of anger courses through her. It's like the monster is chipping away at Will, consuming him from the inside out.

Within minutes, the room is swarming with doctors and scientists. They practically barge each other out of the way to get a look at Will, as if he's a new attraction at the circus. Faye, Mike, Ms. Byers and Bob are forced to stay back while Will is poked and prodded and wired up like a lab rat. Faye glances sideways at Mike, desperate to

tell him about the monster, about what she saw in Will's mind- but she'll have to wait until they're alone.

Before long, Dr. Owens enters- followed by Chief Hopper- and the swarm immediately parts to make way for him. He promptly asks everyone to leave the room apart from Will's family and friends and a couple of men in white coats who look important. The crowd obliges and files silently out of the door. Dr. Owens then instructs those remaining to gather around Will's bed. Faye looks at the boy in front of her; usually Will would hate having so many people staring at him, but he just looks blank. Vacant.

"Do you know your name?" Dr. Owens asks.

"Will," says Will.

"Your full name?" he prompts.

"William Byers."

"Do you know who I am?"

Will thinks for a moment "A doctor."

"Have we met before?"

"I don't remember," Will answers slowly.

Dr. Owens nods, then gestures to Mike "What about this guy here. Do you know who that is?"

Will stares at Mike for a long time "That's my friend Mike."

Faye doesn't like the tone of Will's voice. He sounds methodical, as if he's reciting lines rather than speaking freely.

"How about this young lady?"

Suddenly everyone is looking at her. Faye meets Will's gaze nervously, waiting for him to identify her. She can pinpoint the exact moment when it remembers. When the monster takes control and realizes she is the one who spied on it last night.

"Faye."

To the rest of them, it is a statement. To Faye herself, it is a threat.

It stares at her. Unblinking, menacing. Using Will's body as a disguise, but Faye knows those aren't Will's eyes. She feels herself shaking. Faye can't escape the conviction that were there not a room full of people between them, the monster would be launching itself out of that bed and ripping her to pieces.

Faye wants to run. Every instinct in her body is telling her to get out of there. But she doesn't move. She can't abandon her best friend and let that thing destroy him. She won't. She promised.

Dr. Owens continues questioning Will, eventually bringing in what appears to be a dissected length of the slime vines. One of the men in white coats holds a blowtorch to it and Will recoils in pain. Faye makes eye contact with Ms. Byers. *Now do you believe me?*

A little while later, Faye and Mike sit at a sleeping Will's bedside while Ms. Byers argues with Dr. Owens out in the hall. Faye has lost track of what time it is. Exhaustion is starting to catch up to her, having not had a decent night's sleep for days. Mike gets to his feet "Just going to the bathroom."

He exits the room and shuts the door behind him, leaving Faye alone with Will. She rests her head in her hand, feeling her eyelids grow heavy. Maybe a quick power nap wouldn't be a bad idea. Just as she is starting to doze off, a voice speaks.

"You won't save him."

Faye jumps out of her skin. Will is sitting bolt upright in the bed, grinning down at her. His eyes are black.

"He's mine. I will never let him go."

It's Will's voice, but it's not Will's voice. There is a strange echo to it, much deeper and more sinister. Like two people are speaking at once.

The monster laughs *"You think you're his little friend? He loathes you."*

Faye is almost too frightened to speak "W-what?"

"I can see his mind. He only pretends to be your friend because you're Mike's sister. Think about it, why did he tell Mike about me and not you? Why did he want Mike to take him home on Halloween and not you?"

"You're lying!" Faye cries.

It laughs louder *"He's known about me all this time and he lied to you. See for yourself."*

The monster leans forward and Faye instinctively jerks away from it, but then she realizes what it wants. Trembling, she reaches up and places her hands either side of its face- her fingers stinging from the cold- and shuts her eyes.

There is black smoke everywhere, swirling and screeching around her like a tornado. Faye can't breathe. It's going to choke her. Coughing and gasping, her arms flail desperately, trying to push it away. And then it clears and she falls to her knees, her throat burning. When she looks up, she is in Will's bathroom where he is hunched over the sink, heaving. It looks like he's going to be sick, and then he spits out what appears to be a black slug. Faye frowns in disgust. It almost looks like Dart.

Suddenly they are plunged into darkness, and when the light flicks on again the room is crawling with vines. Faye screams and jumps away from them, but within seconds the bathroom disappears again. All she can see is pitch blackness. Terrified, Faye clasps her hands over her face.

"Please stop!"

The next thing Faye hears is Will's voice "And there was this noise, coming from everywhere."

Faye opens her eyes and she is in the black void again, where she first saw Will and the smoke. Only this time she can see Will and Mike, sitting on a couch in their Ghostbusters costumes. Faye walks towards them.

"And then I saw something," Will continues.

"The Demogorgon?" asks Mike.

Will shakes his head "No, it was like this huge shadow in the sky. Only it was alive, and it was coming for me."

Faye stops a few feet from the couch. Will looks so scared- she wishes she could pull him into a hug.

Unaware of her presence, Will turns to Mike "Please don't tell the others, okay?"

"Not even Faye?" Mike queries.

Will huffs "No, definitely not Faye."

His words knock the air out of her lungs.

"I can't even deal with her right now. She won't leave me alone, it's like she thinks I need a bodyguard."

Faye's vision blurs with tears.

"To be honest, I don't even think I want to be her friend anymore."

It's too much. Faye feels like someone has stuck a knife into her heart. She starts to fall and the vision abruptly cuts out.

Her eyes snap open and she is once again in the hospital room. Faye flies backwards, knocking over the chairs next to Will's bed. The monster is watching her, a satisfied smirk plastered across its face, but Faye isn't scared anymore. She has no capacity left to feel anything apart from the burning sense of *betrayal* clawing its way out from her chest. She can't breathe. She can't think. She can't take it a second longer.

Of their own accord, her feet carry her across the room and she runs. She yanks open the door and she runs as she has never run before in her life.

8. Eleven?

Faye runs as fast as she can, ignoring the voices calling after her. She doesn't really know where she's going, she just keeps following the long, winding corridors of Hawkins Lab until she gets to the main entrance. Faye has always been the best runner of the group; Mike and Lucas both like to pretend they are, and if it were a bike race they could probably beat her- but not on foot. The overgrown grass surrounding the facility pulls at her ankles and almost trips her twice, but she keeps going.

Dusk is closing in and the last streaks of daylight glow orange on the horizon, weighed down by a deep navy sky. Faye sprints through the forest, sending up plumes of fallen leaves in her wake. She doesn't even notice the blood dripping from her nose. Only when she reaches Mirkwood does she finally slow down. Her heartbeat pounds in her ears as if to say 'what did you make me do that for?' and she leans against a tree to catch her breath. Now that she's alone, the tears that have been threatening to fall ever since she snapped out of the vision hit her full-force. Her entire body is wracked with sobs and she slides to the ground, pulling her knees up to her chest.

Faye hasn't cried this hard since the night Will's body was pulled from the quarry. Even then, that was a different kind of hurt. The death of a loved one incites a helpless, hysterical pain as your brain attempts to come to terms with the fact you will never see that person again. What she feels now isn't that. The sharp pressure in her chest, as if someone has dropped a ton of bricks on her, is not like that at all. It isn't just hurt, it's betrayal. A relentless, stinging pain coursing through her body like poison.

It's not true. It's not true. It's not true. Faye chants the words over and over again in her head, willing herself to believe them. She *wants* to believe it. She wants to believe the monster made it up, that he just showed her what he wanted her to see. She wants to believe Will would never say those things. That neither he nor Mike would lie to her like that. She so desperately wants to believe it, but she can hear Will's voice clear as day.

"To be honest, I don't even think I want to be her friend anymore."

A fresh surge of hurt pierces her and Faye sobs even louder. She sits there crying at the base of the tree for what feels like hours, and when she finally lifts her head from her knees it's nighttime. Faye strains her eyes, sore from all the tears, trying to adjust to the lack of light. It's not quite pitch black, thanks to the dim bulbs lining the fence of Hawkins Lab alongside her, but it's enough for anxiousness to settle in the base of her stomach. Faye doesn't know what to do. Without her bike it's a long way home from here- much of it along unlit roads. All her belongings; her radio, her torch, her jacket- are in her backpack, which she left at Will's house. She should go back to the Lab and ask Ms. Byers or Bob for a ride home, but Faye can't bring herself to do it. Ms. Byers will want to know why she ran off and the thought of having to talk about it makes her chest clench painfully.

Suddenly she remembers Nancy mentioning that Steve lives near Mirkwood. If she can find his house then Steve will surely give her a ride home, and if he's not in then she can at least ask to use their phone to call her mom. Faye gets to her feet, her limbs aching in protest after sitting still for so long, and brushes herself down. She sets off in search of Steve's house, hoping it's not too difficult to find. It's a cold evening and she can see her breath clouding in front of her. Faye shoves her hands in her pockets and ventures into the forest, sticking close to the fence for light.

Despite having walked through this forest a hundred times, it always feels different at night. Quieter. More menacing. Faye knows this is the exact spot where Will first saw the Demogorgon and she shivers, forcing herself to stay calm. Every tiny sound makes her jump. A twig snapping. A gust of wind. An owl call. Then suddenly she hears something that stops her in her tracks.

Footsteps.

Faye turns around, her heart in her mouth, but she can't see anyone. She stands perfectly still, too frightened to move. Praying it was just her imagination. Something touches her shoulder and she screams, throwing her arms up over her face. Faye waits for the attack- a knife, a gun, a fist. When nothing happens, she opens her eyes and finds herself face to face with the last person she expected to see.

"E-Eleven?"

The figure in front of her gives a watery smile "Faye."

Faye thought she had cried herself out that evening, but as she pulls her friend into a hug and holds on for dear life, the tears are soon streaming down her face. Why exactly, she doesn't know (shock, happiness, relief?)- nor does she care. Eleven squeezes back, also sobbing.

"Where have you been?!" Faye exclaims "We missed you so much!"

"I missed you too," says Eleven.

Faye unwinds her arms from Eleven's shoulders "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you," Eleven states.

"Me?" Faye repeats.

Eleven nods "I need your help."

The two girls walk back towards the road, their fear forgotten, while Eleven recounts what has happened to her. She tells Faye how she managed to get back from the Upside Down after defeating the Demogorgon, how she tried to find Faye and Mike but it was too dangerous to contact them with their house under constant surveillance, how she was found by Chief Hopper- of all people- who took her in and kept her hidden in his cabin. She then explains how she went looking for her biological mother and what the scientists did to her (Faye feels physically sick as Eleven describes the experiments in detail), and how she keeps having visions of a girl with dark skin whom she believes her mother wants her to find.

When Eleven has finished, Faye hardly knows what to say "So it was you that day at the school?"

Eleven smiles.

"And on Halloween? Your voice?"

"Yes," she nods "I wanted you to follow me."

Faye looks away "I was going to, but... Will, he-"

"I know," Eleven interrupts "I saw."

Faye turns to her "You did?"

"Yes, what happened to him on the field?"

Faye sighs, knowing it's now her turn to explain. She tells Eleven everything. About Will's episodes, about the monster and the black smoke, about how she can somehow see into his mind when the monster is controlling him.

"Wait," Eleven intervenes, frowning "You can see into his mind?"

"Yeah, sort of. I don't know how. Just whenever I put my hands on his face and close my eyes, it's like I'm inside his head."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because I didn't know I could do it," says Faye "I only found out that day on the field."

Eleven is silent for a moment, her face unreadable "Is it just with Will?"

"I tried it with Mike and it didn't work as well, I could only guess specific things he was thinking," says Faye "It doesn't make any sense."

Eleven is staring at her "You're like me."

"What?"

"You can do things with your mind."

Eleven's expression is somewhere between disbelief and excitement, while Faye just shakes her head "No no it's not like that. If it were, wouldn't I have been, you know...in that place too?"

Eleven shrugs "You didn't know you could do it, maybe the bad men

didn't either."

All of a sudden Faye realizes. Her nosebleeds. Eleven always gets them after she uses her abilities. And now that Faye thinks about it, she always gets them after she looks into Will's mind. And the place Eleven described in her visions- the black void- it's the same place Faye saw the smoke, and the couch. What if...what if it is true? What if she can see into people's minds?

"Holy shit," Faye breathes "Mike was right."

Out of the corner of her eye, Faye sees Eleven's expression shift at the mention of Mike's name. Faye chooses her words carefully "He's really missed you, you know. I mean, we all have but Mike...he's missed you the most. He called you every night on the radio, he never gave up hope."

"353 days," Eleven says sadly.

"You heard?" Faye asks.

Eleven nods.

Something occurs to Faye "That day at the school, how come you didn't talk to him?"

In a flash, the sadness is replaced with anger "*Her*."

"Who?"

"Red hair," Eleven snarls.

"Max?!" Faye exclaims, catching on to what Eleven is thinking "No way! There is nothing going on with her and Mike! Mike doesn't even like her! Honestly, he did everything he could to try and stop her joining the party."

Eleven looks up "He did?"

"Yes! I never really knew why but now I think about it, it was probably because he didn't want her to replace you. Not that she ever would, of course, but Mike didn't want to even take the chance," Faye

insists.

"Promise?" Eleven asks.

"Promise."

The corners of Eleven's mouth turn up into a smile. Faye wishes Mike were here so that he could say all this himself, but at least Eleven seems to believe her. Faye has been so engrossed in the conversation that she hasn't been paying any attention to where they are going. When she looks up, she sees that they are heading towards the bus station on the outskirts of town.

"Why are we here?"

"Chicago," says Eleven.

Faye looks at her "What about Chicago?"

"That's where she is. My sister," Eleven explains. She takes Faye's hand "Come with me."

Faye raises her eyebrows "To Chicago?!"

"We can find her together. Maybe she can help you too."

"How?"

"With your powers."

Faye opens and closes her mouth several times, feeling torn. She has never been outside Indiana apart from on family holidays, which are pretty few and far between. Even then, she was with her parents. She's never been anywhere that far on her own. Her mom would *kill* her if she went to Chicago. Not even Nancy would be allowed to go there. But Eleven is right; no-one here will be able to tell her anything about her abilities, and she certainly doesn't want to end up a guinea pig for Hawkins Lab. Plus, her friend needs her.

A bitter voice in the back of her head adds *It's not like Will wants you around anyway.*

"Okay."

Chicago is big, and loud, and very bright. Faye gapes in shock at the size of the buildings (which dwarf everything in Hawkins), having to crane her neck to see the tops of them. The streets are packed with people, most clad in suits or stylish dresses, bustling along to reach their destinations. There are more restaurants, bars and clubs than all the shops in Hawkins put together, and within five minutes Faye sees a dozen types of cars she didn't even know existed. There is only one word to describe it- *incredible*.

Eleven seems to know which direction to go in so Faye just follows, weaving her way through the mass of people and trying not to bump into anyone. After a while, the crowd starts to thin and the streets become quieter. Eleven is leading them away from the city center and into what appears to be Chicago's equivalent of Mirkwood; few cars and an undertone of eeriness. The further they walk, the more run-down the buildings become and the less pleasant the stares from passersby. Were she not with Eleven, Faye wouldn't dream of being somewhere this remote and unfamiliar- not without protection, anyway.

"Are you sure you know where we're going?" Faye whispers as they walk down a foul-smelling alleyway. Men clutching bottles and waving cigarettes wolf-whistle at them and Faye's skin crawls.

"It's not far," Eleven responds. They quicken their pace to get away from the drunks and turn a corner into a street that's completely deserted. Only an old plastic bag blowing across the sidewalk breaks the silence. Faye is beginning to think she may have been a bit reckless. They have no idea where they are, they don't know anyone and they have hardly any money. Where are they going to get food, to sleep? She is about to voice these concerns to Eleven when suddenly her friend stops.

"There."

They are standing in front of what appears to be an abandoned warehouse. Its walls are covered in graffiti and the only sign of movement is the flickering light above the door. It has to be the most

uninviting place Faye has ever seen.

"You gotta be kidding," says Faye.

Evidently, Eleven isn't kidding because she marches straight up to the door and Faye has no choice but to follow. Once inside, they find themselves in a large, damp space which looks like it was once some kind of storage facility. There is a burning barrel situated in the middle of the floor, surrounded by several makeshift chairs, but they are all empty. Faye eyes the barrel cautiously; the fire is burning strong so whoever set it must not have gone far. And then out of nowhere a hand clamps down over her mouth as someone grabs her from behind. Faye tries to scream, to warn Eleven, but it's too late. A man already has his arms around her, restraining her. His hair is a shock of pink spikes and his teeth are stained yellow.

"Well well well, what have we here? Two little lost girlies. Aw, how sweet."

Faye struggles against her captor's hold, but as suddenly as they appeared, the arms around her spring free. Faye spins on her heel and shoves the assailant as hard as she can. The woman is knocked off her feet and lands on the concrete with a loud smack.

"The fuck?" the man holding Eleven exclaims, before he too is flung backwards. A knife flies out of his pocket and Faye ducks down and snatches it.

Eleven glares at him, drops of blood beading at her nostril "Don't call us girlies."

The man scrambles to his feet, his expression livid "You little piece of shit!"

He takes a few steps towards them then stops, staring down at his arms. His eyes widen and he begins to flail wildly "Ah! No! Get off me! Shit! Get off!"

Faye and Eleven exchange looks of alarm. He seems to be having some sort of fit.

"You're a terrible dancer Axel."

They glance up and see a woman with dark skin and long black hair gazing down at them from a flight of metal steps.

It's her- the girl from Eleven's vision.

9. I think you both came here for a reason

"Leave us."

The dark-skinned girl is clearly the group's leader, because the others obediently file outside. As he passes Faye, the man with spiked hair (Axel, was it?) holds out his palm.

"I believe that's mine."

Faye's fingers tighten around the knife "What do you want it for?"

Axel grins "To frighten people."

"I think your face does that just fine."

Axel's eyes widen in fury, but the dark-skinned girl bursts out laughing "She has a point, Axel. Go find something else to play with."

Seething, Axel storms to the door and slams it shut behind him. Faye folds the knife and puts it in her pocket, but keeps a hand around it just in case. The dark-skinned girl descends the metal staircase and comes to stand in front of them "What are your names?"

"Jane," says Eleven, using the birth name she told Faye about earlier.

"Faye."

"And how did you find us?"

Eleven reaches into her bag and pulls out an old photograph "I saw you in the rainbow room."

The dark-skinned girl studies the photograph, realizing it is of herself. She glances at Eleven then reaches for her left arm, revealing the namesake tattoo. Eleven takes the girl's arm in return and holds it up; the number 008 is printed just below her wrist.

"Sister," says Eleven in astonishment.

"Sister," the girl agrees. Eleven pulls her into a hug while Faye

watches, not quite sure what to make of the scene. Eleven isn't usually so quick to trust people.

The girl turns to Faye, her face curious "I don't remember you."

"I wasn't in Hawkins Lab," says Faye.

"But she's like us," Eleven states.

"You're from somewhere else?" the girl asks.

Faye shakes her head "No I grew up in Hawkins, but I didn't know I could...do things until a few days ago."

"What can you do?"

"It's kind of hard to explain, but I think I can show you?"

The girl pauses for a moment then nods. Faye steps forward and places her hands either side of the girl's face, closing her eyes. It's not as easy as it was with Will. Faye has to really concentrate to open the connection- like she's trying to force two opposing magnets together and they're pushing back at her. After several attempts, it finally clicks into place and a sequence of distorted images flash through Faye's mind. Each one is only a few seconds long so it's impossible to decipher exactly what she's seeing; it's as if someone is flicking through TV channels really fast.

Faye's eyes snap open and she lets go, feeling slightly unsteady. That has never happened before. What she just saw seemed to be memories, events from the girl's past- until now she has only been able to see what a person is thinking in the present. Blood trickles from her nose and she wipes it away.

"Your name is Kali. You were taken by the bad men. They hurt you," Faye hesitates, replaying the images in her head. As they become clearer, she realizes they are all extremely violent "...you've hurt people."

Kali smiles "Only the ones who hurt me first."

Faye doesn't respond to this. The most prominent image from Kali's

mind is of a man in a white coat clawing his own eyeballs out while Kali tortures him with demonic hallucinations. That must be her power- to make people see things which aren't there. Like she did with Axel earlier. Faye is most disturbed, however, by the smile plastered across Kali's face as she watches the man lose his mind. It is eerily similar to the monster's smile when Ms. Byers and Bob were lured into his trap.

The three of them sit at the makeshift chairs around the fire. Kali demonstrates her abilities by creating a beautiful, glowing butterfly which flutters around their heads- it looks every bit as real as any butterfly Faye has ever seen. Each of them question one another, learning about the others' powers; how they work, what it feels like. Kali is particularly interested in the fact Faye's abilities remained hidden for so many years- she is adamant they were there all along and Faye just didn't realize. Faye asks her why she thinks this and Kali says the kind of gifts they have cannot be learned, a person either has them or they don't. Even if this is true, Faye still doesn't understand where her gift came from.

"We can talk more tomorrow, but for now you both need to rest," says Kali, getting to her feet. It's already growing light outside and Faye is certain this is the longest she has ever gone without sleep. How she's awake at all is a mystery. Kali leads them upstairs to a space overlooking the warehouse which has been turned into a bedroom; there are a few bookcases, a desk, a chair and a double bed. Faye and Eleven choose a side each while Kali hands them an extra blanket. She then sits in the chair and there are tears rolling down her cheeks.

"What's wrong?" Eleven asks.

"Nothing is wrong," says Kali "I just feel whole, like a piece of me was missing and now it's not. If that makes sense?"

Eleven nods "Yes."

"I think you both came here for a reason. I think this is your home."

"Home," Eleven repeats.

Faye turns to her "But we already have a home."

Kali smiles sadly "We will always be monsters to them, Faye. Once they find out about your gift, they will not treat you the same. They will never understand you." She takes Faye's hand "We must stay together."

The words resonate in Faye's mind long after Eleven falls asleep beside her. She thinks of the horrified looks Ms. Byers and Bob gave her when she tried to explain her abilities to them. She thinks of Lucas calling Eleven a freak last year. Even Mike, getting her to guess the colors when she didn't really want to. Her mom once told her that people don't like things they can't understand. Something twists uncomfortably in Faye's stomach. Maybe Kali is right...maybe things will never be the same. Trying to push these thoughts to the back of her mind, Faye settles down under the covers. She suddenly realizes she is still wearing Will's sweater. The last thought she has before sleep takes her is how she wishes he were there.

"Faye!"

Faye is in the black void. She looks up and sees Mike running towards her.

"Mike?"

She goes to greet him, but he runs right past her.

"Faye! Where are you? Faye!"

Mike's head turns from side to side frantically. He is looking for her. He is worried, panicked even "Faye! Faye!"

She knows Mike can't hear her, but she calls out to him anyway "Mike I'm here! I'm here, Mike!"

Her brother slows down and rests his hands on his knees, panting "Goddammit!"

Faye walks over to him; it's such a bizarre, and cruel, sensation to see him standing right in front of her but knowing she can't talk to him. Mike's eyes are closed and his expression pains her. As twins, Faye can tell exactly how Mike is feeling with a single look- and right now, he's suffering. Upset. Anxiety. Frustration. Faye can see all of them etched into

his face.

"I can't lose you too."

Faye's heart wrenches "Mike, I'm sorry..."

She jolts awake.

For a split second, Faye doesn't recognize her surroundings, and then it comes back to her. She looks over and sees Eleven is still asleep. Faye sits up in the bed, trying to make sense of what she has just seen. Was it a dream? Was it a vision? She reaches up to her nose, but it's not bleeding. Whatever it was, it fills her with guilt. Faye hadn't considered that people back home would be worried about her; so much has been going on that until now she hasn't even missed them. But that look on Mike's face... Of course he's worried, he has no idea where she is. It suddenly dawns on Faye how selfish she's been.

This is probably the longest she and Mike have ever been apart. It's never really occurred to her before, but they literally do everything together. Same family, same friends, same classes at school. He might drive her insane some (or most) of the time, but he's her brother. And not having him around just...doesn't feel right. Like she's missing part of herself. Just as Kali said last night.

"Morning."

Speak of the devil, Kali appears in the doorway. The sound of her voice wakes Eleven, who looks as if she has had a bad dream too. Faye makes a note to ask her about it later.

"You both slept well," says Kali, stepping into the room "Come, it's time for you to meet my friends. Properly this time."

Faye and Eleven follow Kali downstairs and into a small room where the people from the previous night are gathered. There are more than Faye originally thought. As they walk through the door, Axel scoffs at them.

"The sleeping beauties are awake I see."

Kali nods to him "This is Axel."

"The dancing man," Eleven clarifies.

Several of the others snigger "Yes, the dancing man," Kali confirms. She then gestures to a girl with a large blue bow in her hair "This is Dottie, our newest." The girl waves at them and Faye recognizes Dottie as the one who grabbed her last night "And like you two, she just left home."

"You mean the loonie bin," adds Axel.

"Mick," Kali turns to a woman with a large afro sitting at a table "Our eyes, our protector."

Mick lifts her head in greeting then returns to the papers she is hunched over. From the corner, a huge man who looks like a body builder steps forward and Faye's eyes widen nervously.

"This is Funshine, our warrior," says Kali "Don't let his size fool you, Fun's a teddy bear."

Funshine extends his hand "Nice to meet you, Miss. Jane and Miss. Faye."

They shake his hand in turn; Eleven looks down at his wrist, searching for a tattoo.

"If you're looking for a number you won't find one," Kali states. She explains how the group are all outcasts, exiled by society. Funshine says that they were each on the verge of death until Kali found them and saved them. And that now they're fighters. Eleven asks who they're fighting and Kali smiles. She gets up and retrieves an old cardboard box, tipping its contents onto the table. Papers, newspaper cuttings and ID badges all spill out.

Kali leans across the table "Everyone you see here was in some way responsible for what happened to us."

"You hurt the bad men?" Eleven questions.

"No we just give em a pat on the back," Dottie quips.

Faye narrows her eyes "You kill them?"

"They're criminals," Kali immediately responds. "We simply make them pay for their crimes."

Suddenly the images Faye saw in Kali's mind last night make a lot more sense. The violence, the blood, the man in the white coat. She and Eleven look at each other, unsure how to react to this information. Faye knows the bad men did terrible things, and that they deserve to be punished- but hunting them down and torturing them to death... surely whoever did that would be just as evil as the bad men. Eleven continues asking questions when a piece of paper catches Faye's eye; it is crumpled and torn, but she can see it's handwritten, which separates it from the sea of printed letters. Faye picks it up and discovers it is a list of names, some of which have been crossed out. She begins to read and about halfway down the page a name with a single black line through it jumps out at her.

Karen Wheeler.

"That's my mom's name," says Faye. The group pause mid-conversation and turn to her. Faye holds up the paper "What is this? Why is my mom's name on here?"

Kali looks at her "Your mother's name is on that list?"

"Yeah, Karen Wheeler," Faye points to it.

Eleven peers over her shoulder "Mama."

Faye glances at her and Eleven runs her fingertip over the name *Teresa Ives*, which isn't crossed out.

"Both of your mothers?" Kali clarifies.

Mick hums in surprise "Well, I guess that figures."

"What is this?" Faye demands.

Kali takes the paper from her "This is a list of all the people Hawkins National Laboratory experimented on. My mother is on here also."

Faye's stomach clenches "W-what?"

"It's taken us years to gather the information," Kali explains "The Lab advertised for participants in a program called MKUltra, but unfortunately for them, word spread that MKUltra's practices were somewhat controversial, which put a lot of people off signing up. When the scientists didn't get as many test subjects as they wanted, they took matters into their own hands."

Faye frowns "I don't understand."

Kali continues "They hand-picked healthy, young people from the community- such as your mother- and they began to drug them. Slipping psychedelic substances into their water supplies, mostly. They then put them under surveillance; bugging their homes, tapping their phones, watching their every move. The ones who reacted 'favorably' to the drugs were brought in for experimentation by force," she gestures to the strike through Faye's mom's name "Luckily for your mother, she wasn't one of them."

Faye can't believe what she's hearing. Kali walks around the table to stand in front of her "How old are you?"

"Thirteen," Faye answers in a small voice.

"So your mother must have been pregnant with you when she was dosed."

There is a pause before the realization hits "But that means-"

"Mike." Eleven finishes the sentence for her.

"Mike?" Kali asks.

"My twin brother," Faye clarifies "Does this mean he has a gift too?"

Kali considers this "Potentially, yes. It could be that like you, his gift has remained hidden and he has yet to discover it. Although the abilities do tend to be more prevalent in girls than boys, we're not quite sure why. Either way, there are no guarantees."

Faye's head is spinning. She can hardly take in everything Kali has said. Those assholes! As if what they've already done isn't bad enough, drugging innocent people?! Performing heinous experiments

on them against their will?! Thank God her mom didn't 'react favorably', whatever the hell that means. The thought of her in that place, having those things done to her... Faye can't bear to think about it. She is starting to understand why Kali and the others hunt them down and get revenge. Maybe they do deserve it after all.

"But I do know this," Kali puts a hand on Faye and Eleven's shoulders
"What you can do is incredible. It makes you both very special. And I believe this is only the beginning."

10. This is murder

Over the next few hours, Faye and Eleven's abilities are pushed to the extreme.

First, Kali instructs Eleven to draw an old train carriage to them using only her mind. The largest object Faye has ever seen Eleven move was the Hawkins Lab van she flipped in mid-air last year. This carriage is easily three times the size. Faye watches as Eleven extends her arm towards the train and concentrates hard. There is a loud creaking sound and the carriage wobbles, but doesn't move. Eleven's arm shakes as she focuses, unblinking, on her target. The creaking gets louder and for a split second one end of the train lifts a few inches off the ground before slamming down again.

"I can't," Eleven pants. Faye puts a hand on her back.

"Last night you told me you lifted a van once," says Kali.

Eleven nods "Yes."

"The bad men were trying to take you away again and that made you angry. Find that anger, focus on that, not the train," Kali guides.

Faye smiles at her "You can do it."

Eleven lifts her arm and tries again. Kali advises her to think of something which makes her angry, and to channel the anger. Eleven grits her teeth and blood begins to seep from her nostril- whatever memory she is using, it works. Sparks erupt from the wheels of the carriage as it slowly begins to drag along the ground towards them. All the while, Kali encourages her; feeding Eleven's anger, reminding her of everything she has suffered. The train gets faster and Eleven lets out a high-pitched scream. Only when the carriage is a few feet in front of them does she finally let go, collapsing to her knees in exhaustion. Faye grabs her before she can hit the ground and Eleven slumps into her arms. The rest of the gang cheer and applaud from the sidelines.

"Well done Jane," Kali smiles.

Faye pulls Eleven back onto her feet, keeping an arm around her waist to steady her. Kali turns to Faye.

"Your turn."

One by one, Kali asks Faye to read each of their minds. It quickly becomes clear that the better Faye knows someone, the easier it is to establish a connection. With Eleven it is hardly any effort at all, but with Kali's companions (whom she has known less than 24 hours) it is incredibly strenuous. Particularly when they resist her. Axel initially refuses, stating "No way is that little punk getting in my head!" A few stern words from Kali and he relents, but Faye is pretty sure he still tries to throw her off as his mind is choppy and distorted.

"No-one is going to offer up their thoughts willingly," says Kali "You must break through their barriers, make it so that they can't shut you out."

Faye dabs at the blood streaming from her nose "How?"

"The same way Jane did. Find something that makes you angry and use that anger. Allow it to flow through you, to give you strength."

Faye doesn't really understand what Kali means, how can anger give a person strength? But she is aware of everyone watching her and feels like she has to at least try. She replaces her hands on Axel's temples and closes her eyes. Faye casts her mind back to the times she has felt truly incensed: yelling at Eleven after Will's body was pulled from the quarry, watching the monster take control of Will at the hospital, learning what the scientists did to her mom. She replays each of these events over and over again in her head, each time rekindling her fury. Once the anger is bubbling hotly in her stomach, she redirects her attention to Axel's thoughts, attempting to push through his defenses- but now it seems to be even harder. If anything, her anger is distracting her not helping her.

"Ow, get off!" Axel knocks her arms away "You're digging your nails into my skull you little-"

"Axel!" Kali snaps. She puts her hands on Faye's shoulders "Don't worry, you'll get there. Jane and I have been practicing our whole

lives, you're still new at this."

Faye can only nod in response, too out of breath to speak. Eleven hands her a tissue and she pinches the bridge of her nose to stop the bleeding. The group gather around a wall plastered with yet more newspaper cuttings (it's a wonder the entire building hasn't gone up in flames yet), all of which feature large black and white photographs. Kali asks Eleven whether she knows any of the people pictured and Eleven points to a middle-aged bald man. She pulls the cutting off the wall and scowls at it.

"He hurt mama."

"His name is Ray Carroll, and he did more than hurt your mother," says Kali.

Faye suddenly remembers an image from Kali's memories of a man who looked similar to Ray and a young girl with dark hair. It wasn't a clear image, but whatever the man was doing it made the girl scream in agony. It doesn't take long for Eleven to locate Ray with her mind and in the blink of an eye everyone is on their feet, marching around and gathering supplies. It all looks very systematic, as if they have done this many times before. Faye swallows thickly when she sees Axel retrieve a loaded gun from the closet and slips her hand into her pocket to make sure the knife is still there. Dottie ushers Faye and Eleven upstairs and begins circling them, her eyes shifting up and down as she goes.

"Um, what are you doing?" Faye asks.

Dottie grins "If you wanna come out with us, you gotta look the part."

She begins rifling through a chest of drawers and selects several items of clothing, handing a pile each to Faye and Eleven. Faye's consists of a black skirt and tights, grey shirt and patched denim jacket. It's not the sort of thing Faye would usually wear, but her appearance isn't high on her list of priorities at the moment. Once they are changed, Dottie goes to take their old clothing but Faye quickly snatches back Will's sweater and ties it around her waist. Dottie grabs her arm and sits her down, then proceeds to apply makeup to Faye's face and brush out her hair. Faye winces as the bristles twist and yank the

strands, wondering whether Dottie is trying to pull her hair out altogether. When she is finished, Dottie holds up an old mirror and Faye hardly recognizes herself. Her eyes are rimmed with thick black eyeliner- extending out into a winged effect- and her lips are a deep red. More than anything she looks older- with this makeup, she could easily pass as Nancy's twin rather than Mike's.

Once Dottie has worked her magic on Eleven (who now has slicked-back hair and dark eye makeup similar to Faye's), the group head outside and Axel reveals an old van hidden under a sheet of tarp. While the others prep the vehicle, Faye walks up beside Eleven.

"What are we doing?" she whispers.

Eleven's expression is determined "We're making the bad man pay."

Faye turns to her "And by pay you mean kill?"

Eleven doesn't respond to this and Faye steps in front of her "You really want to go out and kill someone?"

"I've done it before."

"When you were forced," Faye points out "This is different. This is *murder*." Faye feels herself start to panic as she says the word "Taking someone's life deliberately, without provocation!"

"He hurt mama," Eleven snaps.

"I know and that was wrong. I'm angry too, but..." Faye looks Eleven directly in the eye "This isn't right. This isn't *us*. We're not like them."

"Yes we are."

"No we're not! We have families, we have homes, people who care about us, who protect us!"

Sadness creeps into Eleven's face "You do."

"So do you!" Faye insists "You have us! Me, Will, Dustin, Lucas, Chief Hopper... Mike."

Eleven's lip starts to tremble at the mention of his name. Faye stares at her imploringly "I saw him in my mind last night. He wants you to come home, for us both to come home."

There is a pause and the determination is slipping from Eleven's face when Kali calls out to them "Jane! Faye! Time to go!"

The two girls look at each other before slowly walking over to the van. It's a tight squeeze and Faye ends up stuck in a corner next to Dottie. The journey has to be the most unpleasant of Faye's entire life; the nerves make her nauseous and the stench of cigarette smoke almost pushes her over the edge. Eventually she is forced to pull the collar of her jacket over her nose, fighting the urge to vomit. All the while, the others are blasting music and Dottie's hair keeps flicking into Faye's face from her headbanging. Kali grabs a bag from under one of the seats and hands out some cheap-looking Halloween masks. After about 45 minutes, they stop at a gas station and Faye is out of the van the second it comes to a halt. She vows never to take fresh air for granted again.

"What are we doing?" Eleven asks.

"Stocking up," answers Kali.

Faye narrows her eyes at the older girl. Are they going to rob the gas station? As far as she's aware, the only money they have is locked in a safe back at the warehouse. The others head inside and Eleven turns around at the door.

"Faye?"

Faye shakes her head "No fucking way. You do what you want, but I'm not going in there."

Eleven hesitates for a moment before following the others. Faye leans against the side of the van and exhales deeply. How did she end up here? A few days ago, she was Trick or Treating with her friends and everything was normal. Now she's miles from home with people she hardly knows (dangerous people, at that), on their way to *kill someone*. Faye almost doesn't believe it- like everything that's happened since the day on the field is one long nightmare she can't

wake up from. Faye's heart clenches. She has tried so hard not to think about it. Ever since she left Hawkins she has put what happened with Will to the back of her mind, she hasn't even told Eleven. But she can't hide from it anymore. What would Will say if he could see her now? See what she's become. A runaway. A thief. An accessory to murder... It is only now that Faye realizes she broke her promise. She promised Will she would get him out, stop the monster from taking over him. But she didn't. She left. She abandoned him. And Mike. And everyone. Faye clasps her hands over her face.

She has to get out of here. To go home.

Faye considers her options. She could find a phone and call her mom, but that would bring up too many questions. She could turn on the tears and get someone to feel sorry for her and give her a ride to the bus station. That could work. She'd have to lose Kali and the others first, something tells her they won't just let her walk away. But she can't go without Eleven- she won't abandon her, too.

The sound of approaching sirens interrupts her thoughts and the door to the gas station suddenly bursts open. They all pile back into the van (which is now even more crowded thanks to the stolen goods) and tear down the street. Miraculously, they manage to outrun the police and are soon back on the road to Ray Carroll's residence. Faye feels somewhat calmer now that she has a plan. She just needs to get Eleven alone first. By the time they pull up outside the nondescript apartment block, it's already dark. Kali asks Eleven to confirm that Ray is inside, which she does. The group then don their Halloween masks and make their way to the front door.

Faye's heart is pounding as they tiptoe up the stairs. To her knowledge, her own house has never been broken into, but the thought has always scared her- never in a million years did she think she'd be the one doing the breaking. Eleven unlocks the door and they step inside. Ray is in the living room, bending over the TV set with his back to them. They creep through the kitchen and come to a stop behind him.

"Hello Ray," says Kali.

Ray spins round in alarm and his eyes widen with panic. "Jesus

Christ!" he exclaims, attempting to make a break for the door, but Funshine blocks his path.

"Sit down," Funshine growls, throwing Ray into a chair when he doesn't comply. Faye fidgets uncomfortably.

"Please, just take what you want," Ray squeaks.

"Oh, we will," says Axel.

"Where's your wallet?" asks Dottie.

"My bedroom, in my jeans," Ray stutters.

Dottie and Axel disappear down the hall and Kali walks across the room towards shaking Ray. She removes her mask, gesturing for Eleven to do the same. Faye lingers anxiously in the doorway.

"Do you remember us?" asks Kali.

Ray shakes his head. As Faye watches him, her vision suddenly becomes blurred and she grabs onto a sideboard to steady herself. For a moment, she thinks she is going to pass out, and then an image of two young girls flashes in her mind. They are crouched in a corner, crying and holding each other's hands. Faye has never seen them before, but the image is crystal clear- as if they are right in front of her. As quickly as it appeared, the vision is gone and Faye has to take her mask off to wipe the blood from her nose. She accidentally knocks over a photograph on the sideboard and as she reaches for it, she sees the same two little girls in the frame. Faye glances at Ray and the realization hits. She just saw into Ray's mind... without physical contact. Without even having to try. The two little girls must be his daughters.

Without warning, Ray's body flies across the room and smashes into the wall in front of her. Faye springs out of the way and looks up to see Eleven's arm outstretched, blood dripping from her nostril. A gaping wound has opened on Ray's forehead and he sobs quietly.

"Please, I just did what he told me to do. He said she was sick!"

Kali shakes her head "You had a choice Ray, and you chose to follow

a man you knew was evil."

"Please!" Ray begs "I can help. I can help you find him."

"Find who?" asks Kali.

"Brenner. I can take you to him."

Eleven grits her teeth "Papa is gone."

"No, he is alive," says Ray.

Faye stares at Ray and once again an image flashes into her mind, this time of Dr. Brenner.

"Do not lie to us Ray," Kali threatens.

"He's not lying," Faye asserts. The others turn to her "I can see it."

Kali glares at Faye, as if she doesn't trust her. Eleven looks torn between anger and fear.

"Either way, it won't save you," Kali announces as Ray dissolves into tears "Do it Jane."

Faye steps forward "El no-"

"Stay back!" Kali bites "Do it!"

Faye pulls the knife out of her pocket.

11. You'll pay for this, Faye

"NO!"

Faye leaps between Kali and Ray, pointing the knife at the older girl. For a split second Kali is stunned, but then her lips curl back over her teeth.

"Get out of the way!" she hisses.

Faye shakes her head "I'm not going anywhere."

Eleven hovers anxiously beside them, her eyes darting from Faye to Kali and back again - waiting for one of them to strike. Faye, meanwhile, has no idea where this sudden courage has come from, but she stands her ground.

A low growl rumbles in Kali's throat "I'm getting sick and tired of your games, little girl."

"This isn't a game, this is someone's life!" Faye snaps.

Kali's tone becomes mocking "And you think you can stop us taking it?"

Before Faye can respond, something tickles her outstretched arm and she glances down. A huge black spider scurries across her skin, then another, and another, until dozens of them are swarming along her arm. Faye screams and the knife clatters to the floor. She knows it's not real, that it's just Kali using her powers, but that doesn't stop her thrashing wildly and clawing at her sleeve.

As suddenly as they appear, the spiders are gone, and Faye barely has time to look up before Kali slaps her hard across the face.

"No!" Eleven cries.

Faye has never been slapped before and she isn't prepared for the painful stinging sensation that erupts across her cheek. It distracts her long enough for Kali's hand to clamp down around her neck.

"If Jane didn't care about you so much, I'd kill you for interfering," Kali spits in her ear. She then turns to Eleven "Do it Jane! Kill him now and avenge your mother!"

"No! El don't!" Faye chokes, struggling against Kali's hold.

Eleven appears to be hyperventilating; her breaths coming in sharp bursts and her arms shaking at her sides.

"DO IT!" Kali roars. Raking her hands through her hair, Eleven lets out an ear-piercing scream.

And then it happens.

With an almighty shove, Faye sends Kali flying backwards onto the floor. Enraged, Kali jumps to her feet and is about to lunge at Faye when the younger girl's arm flies up and Kali freezes. Faye feels as if her body has been electrified. Adrenaline pulses furiously in her veins and whereas two minutes ago she couldn't prise Kali's fingers from around her neck, she now feels as if she could punch a hole through the wall. Like something has snapped inside her.

Kali stands perfectly still, and her eyes - which a moment ago were glistening with fury - are now wide and terrified. Palm outstretched, Faye's arm hovers in midair and Kali doesn't move a muscle nor make a sound. It takes a couple of seconds for Faye to realise that *she* is the one controlling Kali's movements.

Emboldened by this revelation, Faye bows her head and concentrates hard, and Kali begins stumbling backwards until she crashes into the opposite wall. Footsteps run up behind her and Funshine (whom Faye had completely forgotten was in the room) attempts to grab her, but the second his fingers touch her shoulder he is thrown sideways and knocked out. Faye turns around and sees Eleven staring down at him, fresh blood trickling from her nostril. She glances at Ray, who is cowering and sobbing on the floor, then her eyes fix on Kali.

"If you really want to kill him that's your choice, but you're not turning us into monsters like you."

Faye lowers her arm and Kali's body drops to the ground, like a

puppet whose strings have been cut. A sudden, crushing exhaustion washes over her and Faye sways on her feet for a moment before Eleven grabs her hand.

"We need to go."

The sound of sirens in the distance confirms Eleven's statement. Faye takes one last look at Ray, then nods and follows Eleven out of the apartment. Unbeknownst to Faye, Kali watches her leave through narrowed eyes, her hands balling into fists.

"You'll pay for this Faye."

When Faye wakes up, the first thing she's aware of is a low rumbling sound beneath her. Something cold is pressed against her cheek and when she opens her eyes she realises it's a window. Peeling her skin away from the glass, Faye sits up and finds herself on a bus with absolutely no recollection of how she got there.

"Hey."

Eleven is in the seat beside her. The dark circles under her eyes suggest she hasn't slept at all.

"Hey... wh-where are we?" Faye asks.

"You don't remember?"

Faye shakes her head and Eleven recounts that the police showed up as soon as they left Ray's apartment. Apparently they were forced to run for a few blocks until they managed to flag down a taxi, which took them to the bus station (Eleven having had the sense to grab some money off Ray's kitchen counter). None of this rings a bell to Faye - the last thing she remembers is fighting with Kali in the apartment, the rest is a blur. She must have been so drained that she passed out as soon as they got on the bus.

While Faye attempts to process the information, Eleven is watching her with a sombre expression. "How did you do it?"

There's no confusion over what Eleven is referring to. Faye has been

asking herself the same question ever since it happened. A long pause stretches out before she answers.

"I don't know," Faye eventually says. She chooses her words carefully, replaying the scene over in her head "It was like there was this pressure building inside me, and I couldn't control it... It kept getting bigger and bigger... And then it just exploded."

"When you got angry?" Eleven prompts.

Faye considers this a moment. "No. I wasn't angry... I was scared."

She remembers how she had been able to see into Ray's mind without touching him - like his thoughts had jumped out at her. He had been scared, too. Faye frowns, trying to figure out the significance of this... When people are scared, they're less in control of themselves. Kali said that her powers had been there since she was born, and that Faye just hadn't known it - until the day on the field. Faye had definitely been scared then, scared that the monster was going to hurt Will. And last night she'd been scared that Eleven was going to hurt Ray.

It all starts to make sense. Faye's powers reveal themselves when she is in trouble - when she's trying to protect herself, or someone else. Maybe being able to control Kali's mind was her powers reacting to the situation at hand, to stop Kali from forcing Eleven to kill Ray. Faye's head spins as she lets this realisation sink in. If she's capable of controlling someone's mind, what else is she capable of?

Eleven's voice interrupts her thoughts. "Why did you want to save him?"

Faye turns to her "It wasn't about him. I didn't want you to do something you'd regret. I didn't want to lose you again. You're one of us El, we need you. I need you."

Tears fill Eleven's eyes and she reaches over to take Faye's hand. "I need you, too." She shakes her head "You won't lose me again."

"Promise?" Faye asks.

"Promise."

Outside, rain has begun to pour and it lashes against the roof of the bus, drizzling down the windows. As she watches the droplets fall, Faye can just about make out a white sign through the darkness which reads 'Welcome to Hawkins.'

She smiles. "We're home."

Author's note: I'm sorry this chapter has taken so long! I actually had half of it written for ages, but Fanfic helpfully decided to delete it, so I had to start again from scratch. Thank you to anyone who has stuck with the story and I'll try not to leave it another seven months before I upload chapter 12! Any reviews greatly appreciated, as always!

12. 353 days

The second Faye's foot hits the ground, she knows something is wrong. The hairs on the back of her neck and along her arms suddenly jump up, and it has nothing to do with the cold November air. It's enough to stop her in her tracks, halting the line of passengers waiting to get off the bus behind her. One of them coughs impatiently and Eleven takes Faye's hand and pulls her aside.

"What is it?" she asks once they are safely out of earshot.

Faye's eyebrows knit together worriedly. "I don't know, but it's bad."

A sense of dread settles in the pit of her stomach and creeps up into her lungs, forcing her breaths out in sharp, uneasy bursts. It's the same feeling she gets whenever she sees Hawkins Lab. Faye always assumed it was brought on by being in close proximity to the Upside Down, but they're at least a mile away from the gate here. Unless it's gotten bigger, or more gates have been opened... This thought clicks her mind back into focus and Faye forces the feeling of tension aside to concentrate on what to do next.

How long have they been gone? Two, maybe three days? It occurs to her that she's had no contact with anyone back home the entire time she's been in Chicago. Mike, Nancy, her mom... they must be going out of their minds with worry. For all Faye knows, there's a search party looking for her right now. Just like with Will last year-

Will.

Suddenly all her other concerns are forgotten. The last time she saw Will, he was lying unconscious in a hospital bed while the monster made him its puppet. A shiver runs up her spine as she remembers the way it talked to her, with that horrible demonic voice. What if it's even worse now? What if it has Will completely under its control?

"We need to get to Will," Faye asserts, stressing the urgency of her words. "The monster has him and it's not gonna let him go unless we stop it."

Eleven hesitates. "What about Mike?"

A pang of guilt steals through her. "I want to see him too, believe me. But I promise, Will needs us more right now. Can you find him?"

Eleven nods and closes her eyes. Faye waits anxiously, shifting her weight from foot to foot. She has to make sure Will is okay, she has to. If something's happened to him while she's been away... Faye shakes her head and the train of thought is abruptly cut off, too awful to even think about. Blood begins to seep from Eleven's nostril and her eyelids flutter wildly, the way people's do when they're having a bad dream.

"El?" Faye asks, concerned.

Something's not right. Eleven's hands ball into fists and tremors reverberate across her body like she's having a seizure. Alarmed, Faye grabs her shoulders and tries to wake her up.

"El! El!"

With a sharp intake of breath, Eleven's eyes snap open. All the colour has drained from her cheeks and she is frozen stiff.

"What did you see?" Faye questions, already scared of the answer.

Eleven's mouth trembles, evidently struggling to put whatever it is into words. When she does speak, it's barely a whisper.

"Monster."

Faye's blood runs cold. "The Demogorgon?"

"No, they're smaller."

"*They?!'*" Faye repeats, panicked. "How many are there?!"

Eleven swallows thickly. "Lots."

Deliberating for a moment, Faye reaches up with her hand. "Can I?"

Understanding her meaning, Eleven nods slowly. Faye places her

hands on Eleven's temples and closes her eyes. The second her fingertips make contact with El's skin, the ground falls out from under her and she is plunged into the spiraling darkness of the black void. The first thing she hears is a guttural snarl behind her and Faye turns around. A four-legged creature with leathery grey skin stands before her, its five sprawling jaws opening to reveal rows upon rows of blood-stained serrated teeth. It advances in her direction and Faye is rooted to the spot with terror, but to her relief, the monster walks straight past her. It looks like the Demogorgon, but as El said - it's smaller, and reminds her more of an animal than a mutated human. Suddenly, an identical snarl echoes the first and a second monster emerges from the shadows, followed by a third, and a fourth, and a fifth...

In a matter of seconds, the ground is swarming with them and Faye is surrounded. She watches with a mixture of astonishment and horror, terrified to move in case they realise she's there and attack. One bite from those jaws would take her head off. As slowly as possible, she rotates on the spot in the direction the army is heading, and a hole is punched through her chest.

They're going to Will's house.

"NO!"

Her eyes fly open. Faye feels as if the air has been ripped from her lungs - she can't believe what she's just seen. There must have been at least fifty of them. Fifty blood-thirsty monsters from the Upside Down, right here, right now. And they're after Will.

Eleven steps forward. "Let's go."

With a shaky nod, Faye follows her - praying they aren't too late.

The woods outside the Byers' house is always eerie after dark, but throw in the very real possibility that a monster could be lurking around every tree trunk - and it becomes something out of a nightmare. Faye's heart pounds as she pushes her way through the foliage, torn between her desperation to get to Will and her instinct to be as quiet as possible.

Faye is reminded of what Dustin said last year when the party were out looking for Will in Mirkwood; about how they were knowingly walking straight into danger - just like she and Eleven are doing right now. The monsters are supposed to chase you, not the other way around. But what choice do they have; if they go home and tell Faye's mom, she'll go right to Hawkins Lab - and the last time they got involved, everyone nearly died. They could go to Chief Hopper, but that would take too much time.

No. They have to deal with this themselves.

Just as this thought enters Faye's mind, the trees thin into a small clearing, in the middle of which stands Castle Byers - beams of moonlight highlighting its distinctive edges. They're almost there.

"Stop."

Faye freezes mid-step, glancing at Eleven. "What is-"

The question dies on her tongue. Something is moving out there.

At that moment, two things happen at once; Faye surveys the treeline surrounding the clearing and realises they've been lured into a trap - and an enormous set of jaws lunges for her throat.

"DUCK!"

The pair drop to the ground in the nick of time and the monster's claws graze Faye's hair as it flies over her, skidding to a halt a few feet away. Enraged, it lets out a deafening shriek that rips at Faye's eardrums. As it crouches to attack again, Faye isn't quick enough and the monster knocks her off her feet, digging its claws into her chest. Faye screams as thousands of razor-sharp teeth prepare to sink into her skin, but without warning the monster is violently flung aside.

Eleven pulls Faye to her feet as two more monsters appear on opposite sides of the clearing, stalking along the perimeter like lions toying with their prey. Faye grits her teeth.

"Stand back to back."

Eleven moves into position behind her so that they're each facing one

of them. The monster hisses menacingly, but this time Faye is ready for it. Just as it did with Kali, her arm flies out in front of her as the creature moves to pounce - and instead it freezes. Unlike in Chicago (when she was so consumed with shock that she didn't take notice), Faye can *feel* the monster yielding to her; almost as if it's an extension of her own body. She flicks her fingers outward and it yelps and staggers back, slamming its head into a tree and collapsing.

A cry of pain followed by a horrible splattering sound has Faye looking over her shoulder to see Eleven's monster lying in a pool of blood. Inexplicably, a laugh jumps out of her mouth.

"Take that you little bitches!"

More monsters emerge from the treeline and Faye's fear dissolves as she and Eleven take out each and every one. By the fourth or fifth, she doesn't even need to raise her arm - all it takes is a look and they're at her mercy. *This is what you get* Faye thinks viciously *This is what you get when you come after my friends*. Eventually, when the clearing is littered with dozens of slimy grey corpses, the wood falls silent.

"Is that all of them?" Faye asks. She feels Eleven relax against her back.

"I think so."

Letting out a breath of relief, Faye wipes the blood from her nose and peers through the trees. She can just about make out the lights of the Byers' residence and a fresh wave of adrenaline rushes through her.

"Come on."

No longer concerned with keeping quiet, the two girls sprint the short distance to the house. Faye sees her and Mike's bikes still propped against the porch where they left them, behind which three cars are parked; one is Jonathan's, one Faye doesn't recognise and the third is Chief Hopper's cruiser.

Eleven stops in her tracks.

"El?" Faye turns around to face her and Eleven shakes her head.

"I can't go in, he'll kill me."

"What?"

"I'm not supposed to leave the cabin," El explains.

Faye glances between Eleven and the house, then back again. "Okay, just wait here a sec."

Walking up the steps of the porch, Faye reaches the front door and suddenly finds herself frozen. After everything she went through to get here, now that all she has to do is reach up and push the door open she can't seem to do it. The fear of what might be on the other side is keeping her arm firmly glued to her chest. What if she's too late? What if the monster is waiting for her, wearing Will's body as a mask. She doesn't think she could take it, she'd rather just die now than have to lose Will all over again...

But she can't stand here forever. Steeling herself, Faye grabs the handle and pushes.

The door swings open and the first thing Faye sees isn't the monster, or Will - but everyone else. A sea of astonished faces are gaping at her from across the room: Mike, Nancy, Dustin, Lucas, Max, Chief Hopper, Jonathan, Ms. Byers, even Steve Harrington. They're all here! They're all okay!

"Faye!"

Before she can even blink, Mike launches himself at her and a pair of arms are crushing the air out of her lungs.

"Holy shit!" Nancy exclaims, handing the gun she is holding to Chief Hopper (since when did Nancy have a gun?!) and joining in the death hug. Faye feels as if her siblings might actually suffocate her, but she can't bring herself to care. She's just so happy to see them and returns the hugs with equal vigour.

"What the hell happened to you?" Mike demands as he pulls back. "Where've you been?"

"We thought you were dead!" adds Nancy, accentuating her words

with a harsh shake to Faye's shoulders.

"I-" Faye begins, but Mike cuts her off.

"Do you have any idea how worried I was?! I've never been so fucking scared in my life!"

"I-"

"How could you just run off like that?!" snaps Nancy.

The pair continue to fire angry remarks at Faye before Chief Hopper intervenes. "Alright, take it easy. Let the kid speak."

Mike and Nancy fall silent, staring at her expectantly - as does the rest of the room. Faye takes a deep breath and wonders where to start.

"I was in Chicago."

"*Chicago?*!" her siblings gasp in unison.

"You went all the way to Chicago by yourself?!" says Nancy in disbelief.

"Not exactly..." Faye corrects.

Mike frowns. "What d'you mean not exactly?"

A creak on the floorboards of the porch diverts his attention. Faye smiles knowingly. "I had to get someone."

Stepping aside, Faye glances over her shoulder just as Eleven appears in the doorway. For a moment, Mike is too stunned to react, but then he's walking towards her, eyes glistening with tears.

"Eleven?"

El's face lights up. "Mike!"

The two embrace, clinging to each other for dear life as Eleven cries unabashedly into Mike's shoulder.

"Is that..." Max whispers to Lucas, who nods disbelievingly.

Faye can't help but smile as she watches them, knowing how much they've longed for each other. She doesn't think she's ever seen Mike this happy.

"I never gave up on you," Mike says earnestly, speaking to El as if there's no-one else in the room. "I called you every night! Every night for-"

"353 days," Eleven confirms. "I heard."

Mike's face falls. "Why didn't you tell me you were there? That you were okay?"

"Because I wouldn't let her."

Chief Hopper steps forward and Faye can't tell whether he's about to shout at El or hug her - in the end he does the latter. It takes all of three seconds for Mike to go from the happiest she's ever seen him to the angriest.

"You've been hiding her!" he growls. "You've been hiding her this whole time!"

In a fit of rage, Mike flies at Hopper and shoves him hard, but Hopper just turns around and grabs Mike by the front of his shirt. "Hey! Hey! Let's talk. Alone."

Mike looks like he's about to protest, glancing from Hopper to El before finally wriggling out of Hopper's grip and storming down the hall. With a sigh, Hopper follows him. In the silence that remains, Faye is free to voice the question that's been on the tip of her tongue since she walked through the door.

"Where's Will?"

Author's note: Sorry I didn't realise the last chapter was so short! Hopefully this one makes up for it!

13. He likes it cold

Faye's question hangs heavily in the air and it appears no-one wants to answer it. The figures in the room avert their gazes, staring intently at the wallpaper or down at their shoes. She fixes each of them with a piercing glare until eventually Ms. Byers relents.

"I'll take you to him."

Grateful, Faye nods and follows her to Will's bedroom. The sound of Mike and Hopper yelling at each other carries down the hall, but right now that's not her problem. All she cares about is seeing Will.

Ms. Byers pushes the door open to reveal Will lying on the bed, still wearing his hospital gown. Faye's heart lurches - he looks so pale and... fragile. She feels her legs shaking as she walks over to the bed, fighting the urge to throw her arms around him. Faye has to strain her eyes to see the rise and fall of Will's chest - he seems to be barely breathing.

"He's not doing well," Ms. Byers admits, sounding both anxious and exhausted. She probably hasn't slept since Faye last saw her.

"I know," says Faye, struggling to keep her voice steady. "I shouldn't have left."

"Why did you leave, sweetie?" Ms. Byers presses. "We were all so worried about you. One minute, you were right there then the next you disappeared."

Faye doesn't answer, worried if she opens her mouth she'll burst into tears. Ms. Byers glances over her shoulder and lowers her voice.

"Was it because of your powers?"

This catches Faye off guard. She'd forgotten that she told Ms. Byers and Bob about being able to read Will's mind.

"Where is Bob?" she asks, feeling guilty that she hadn't noticed he was missing until now.

Sadness floods Ms. Byers's face. "He's dead."

She explains the events that took place while Faye was gone, detailing how the monster pretended to be Will and lured a group of men into the tunnels where they were ambushed and killed. About how the smaller monsters (which Dustin has apparently named Demodogs) attacked them at the hospital and how Bob died trying to protect them.

Faye knows it's incredibly selfish, given that good men died because of it, but she can't help feeling the tiniest bit relieved. If the monster could trick grown adults into the tunnels, it was definitely capable of tricking Faye into thinking Will said those horrible things about her. That he didn't want to be her friend anymore.

Sighing, she reaches up to take his hand - wishing she could talk to him, hear his voice again, see him smile. But the instant her fingers touch his skin, they turn to ice and darkness explodes across her vision. A thunderous roar that makes the shriek of the Demodogs seem like a kitten's meow splits her eardrums, and a whirring cloud of black smoke swarms Faye's entire body.

Amidst the chaos, from somewhere very far away, a voice cries out.

"FAYE!"

Gasping for breath, Faye snatches her hand back and falls to the floor. *Will*. He's still in there.

"What happened? What did you see?" Ms. Byers demands, kneeling in front of her.

The room is spinning and Faye pulls herself up on the edge of the bed, looking at Will. He's still unconscious but his body is twitching, fresh beads of sweat glistening on his forehead. The monster is furious that Faye has come back - he won't stay asleep for long.

Faye gets to her feet. "Will's alive, he's still in there. But we don't have much time."

Ms. Byers hurries after her as Faye strides back to the living room. Mike and Hopper have returned, their dispute evidently resolved - at

least for now. *Good* Faye thinks *We can't afford any distractions.*

"Faye."

Eleven walks up and hands her a piece of paper with the words 'Close Gate' written in red crayon.

"What's this?" Faye frowns.

"It's a message from Will," Dustin answers. "He used Morse code to get it to us."

"He's trying to help us stop the monster," Mike adds. "But the monster is doing everything it can to stop him."

Faye nods. "I know, it won't let me into his mind."

"What d'you mean?" Lucas asks.

Faye looks at Lucas, Dustin and Max's confused expressions and decides it's time to come clean. "Um, yeah. Turns out I can read minds."

"*What?!*" they chant in unison, eyes bulging.

"Not just read them, control them," Faye clarifies.

Mike looks at her. "Since when?"

"Since Chicago."

Faye recounts her and Eleven's crazy few days with Kali's gang as the rest of the party listen in astonishment. El jumps in every now and again to add her take on things, and when they're finished a stunned silence descends. Faye glances up and realises everyone in the room has been listening, and now they're all staring at her like she's grown an extra head. She fidgets uncomfortably.

Dustin is the first one to break the silence. "Do you realise what this means?"

The others turn to him. "*Two* of our best friends have superpowers!

"That makes us untouchable!" he beams. "We can do anything we want!"

"We could make Troy pee himself every time he's a jerk to us," Lucas muses.

"Or make Keith let us go the arcade for free whenever we want!" Dustin grins.

"Or beat the crap out of my idiot brother," Max suggests.

Faye and Eleven exchange amused smiles as their friends continue to come up with ludicrous uses for their powers - which quickly escalate from free ice cream all the way to world domination. The sound of Chief Hopper's hand slamming down on the table breaks up the brainstorming session.

"Enough! Do you guys think this is a joke?!" His eyes fix on Faye. "You might think that you've been blessed, but these powers aren't a blessing, they're a curse." He gestures to Eleven "Why do you think I had to keep El locked away?"

"Because you're an asshole," Mike mutters.

"Because I was trying to protect her!" Hopper insists. "And now, Faye's gonna need protecting too."

Fury flashes in Mike's eyes. "You're not locking her away as well!"

"I'm not suggesting that, but I'm saying you kids can't go around advertising the fact that Faye has these powers - unless you want to get her killed."

"He's right, sweetie," Ms. Byers adds. "You know what the bad men did to El. They'll do it to you too if they find out."

Faye hadn't even considered any of this. Is Hopper right? Is having these powers going to do more harm than good? She thought they would help her to protect those she cares about, but maybe she's just putting them in more danger.

"Hey kid, look at me."

Hopper bends down in front of her and Faye meets his surprisingly kind blue eyes. "You're gonna be okay. We won't let anyone take you away. Promise."

Something about the way he looks at her, and the genuine tone of his voice, comforts and reassures Faye. Her own father has never spoken to her like that, come to think of it - Faye doesn't think her father has ever had a real face to face conversation with her. Their limited interactions take place over the top of his newspaper or through a mouthful of chicken at the dinner table. She suddenly understands why El trusts Hopper so much, and wishes her own father could be more like him.

Faye nods and Hopper squeezes her shoulder before getting to his feet. "What we've just talked about doesn't leave this room, understand?"

Everyone nods and Faye lets out a breath she didn't realise she was holding. Eleven slips her hand into Faye's own and gives her a comforting smile, while Mike moves to stand on her other side and lets his arm rest against hers. Faye feels a surge of gratitude.

"Now that we've got that sorted," Jonathan ventures. "What're we gonna do about Will?"

"It's not like it was before, it's grown a lot," Hopper states. "And I mean that's considering we can get in there, the place is crawling with those dogs."

The group are gathered around the Byers' kitchen table, trying to come up with a plan to get Eleven back to Hawkins Lab to close the gate - as Will instructed. El was the one to open it in the first place, so it makes sense that she should be the one to close it again.

"Demodogs," says Dustin.

Hopper blinks at him. "I'm sorry what?"

"I said Demodogs, like Demogorgon and dogs. You put them together it sounds pretty badass-"

"How is this important right now?!" Hopper snaps.

Dustin lowers his voice. "It's not, I'm sorry."

Faye bites back a grin. Typical Dustin - their lives are at stake and he's more concerned with nomenclature.

"I can do it."

Everyone looks at Eleven. "You're not hearing me-" Hopper begins.

"I'm hearing you. I can do it," she repeats with conviction.

Mike shakes his head. "Even if El can there's still another problem." He glances at Faye. "If the brain dies, the body dies."

Faye understands immediately and her heart sinks. As long as Will is under the monster's control, he is bonded to it - and they can't hurt it without hurting him. The conversation continues around her, but Faye is no longer listening. There has to be a way. They have to get it out of him before Eleven closes the gate... or they lose him forever.

Out of the corner of her eye, Faye notices Eleven watching her. Almost as if the other girl can hear what she's thinking. Suddenly, it dawns on her; it's not a question of 'them' getting the monster out of Will, but Faye herself. She has to be the one to do it, just like Eleven has to be the one to close the gate. She's the only other person with powers. The only other person who's strong enough to take on the monster. Maybe this is what her powers have been for all along...

"Closing the gate will kill him," says Mike.

Faye stands up. "No it won't."

Eleven smiles at her and the two girls share a silent understanding. "I can get it out of him."

"How?" asks Hopper.

"Its mind is in Will, and I can manipulate minds - which means I can force it out," Faye explains.

Ms. Byers steps forward, sceptical. "Have you done it before?"

Faye hesitates "Not exactly, but I was there the day it got him. I saw it and I've talked to it, I know how it thinks."

Flashbacks of the day on the field reel through Faye's mind; the vortex of black smoke engulfing Will, forcing its way into his body. The vision of the vines suffocating Ms. Byers and Bob. The demonic voice at the hospital. Faye remembers what Kali told her, about using anger to make her stronger, and realises she was wrong. Anger and hatred are what make a person weak; they don't strengthen you, they consume you - eating away piece by piece until there's nothing left but waste and disappointment. Faye's powers are at their fiercest when she is trying to protect someone she cares about, and there are few people - if any - she cares about more than Will.

"If it wants to kill him, it will have to kill me first."

There is a long pause while the gravity of these words sinks in.

"Okay," Hopper finally says. "You stay here and help Will. El and I will go to the gate."

"It can't be here," Mike points out. "The monster knows where we are here, it'll just send more dogs after us."

Hopper thinks for a moment. "I know a place. Jonathan, follow me."

The two of them disappear outside, just as something occurs to Faye. "There's still one problem, we need to draw it out first."

"What d'you mean?" asks Mike.

"It won't let me anywhere near Will's mind right now. It's safe in there, it knows no-one can get to it," she explains. "So we have to distract it somehow, enough for me to get past its defenses."

Ms. Byers frowns, muttering under her breath. "He likes it cold..."

Faye looks up. "What?"

"He likes it cold," Ms. Byers repeats. "That's what Will kept saying to

me."

Faye recalls how icy Will's skin has been every time she's touched him, how he screamed and writhed in agony when the doctors set fire to the vines.

"We keep giving it what it wants!" Ms. Byers yells angrily.

"If this is a virus," Nancy theorises. "And Will's the host..."

"Then we have to make the host uninhabitable," Dustin finishes.

It all makes sense. Faye glances at the pack of matches on the table.
"We need to burn it out of him."

Author's note: Thank you to everyone who has already left a review/favourite/follow. If anyone who reads this story would be kind enough to let me know how they think it's going, if they'd like to see more or less of anything - that would be really helpful. I have an idea of what direction I want the ending to take, but am more than happy to receive suggestions!

14. You're too late

The old clock in the Byers' kitchen strikes midnight as the group prepares to split up. Dustin, Lucas, Max and Mike will stay at the house under Steve's supervision, in case more Demodogs attack. Hopper and Eleven will go to Hawkins Lab, while Jonathan, Nancy, Ms. Byers and Faye will take Will to Hopper's cabin in the woods. There, they can wake the monster without fear of it recognising where it is. And then Faye can destroy it.

The house is a hub of activity as people rush back and forth, making preparations and gathering supplies. Faye takes the opportunity to slip away to the back porch and sits on the bottom step, grateful for a few minutes of solitude. Her fingers grip the edge of the wood and she exhales deeply, trying to clear her head.

She knows what she has to do, she just hasn't quite figured out how to do it. Up until now, she's relied mostly on instinct when it comes to her powers - they seem to just kick in whenever the situation calls for it. But somehow she doesn't think that's going to be enough with the monster. It's strong, and it's angry, and it knows Faye is a threat - so it'll take a hell of a lot more than a couple of mind tricks to fight it off.

Faye remembers when Eleven killed the Demogorgon last year... how she nearly died in the process. And that was considering El had been using her powers all her life. Faye has only known about hers for what, a week? This thought sends a cold stab of doubt through her heart. One week? Is that really all it's been? Even if Kali was right and her powers have been there all along, Faye doesn't have nearly the same level of control that El does.

Panic begins to set in as Faye wonders whether this has all been a mistake. What the hell was she thinking saying she could take on the monster?! What basis does she have for that? So she's read a few people's minds - big whoop. That doesn't involve any real effort, she just touches them and it happens. Manipulating minds, okay sure - that requires concentration and skill. But it still doesn't equate to forcing the consciousness of an evil, otherworldly entity out of a human body. Just attempting something like that could kill her.

Strangely, Faye isn't frightened by this. She waits for the fear to set in, but it never comes. And then she realises - what scares her most isn't her own death, it's the death of someone she loves. In this case, Will. She already thought he was dead once before, and it's without a doubt the most pain and despair she's ever felt in her life. If Faye had the choice of dying, or having to go through that again, there's no question as to which she would choose.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter whether she can defeat the monster or not. She has to *try*. For Will.

"Hey."

Someone sits on the step beside her. Faye doesn't need to look up to know it's Mike. "How's it going in there?"

"I think everyone's about ready." He turns to her. "Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

Faye shrugs. "I hope so..."

Had it been anyone else, Faye would have said "Yeah, definitely. Sure I'm sure." But this is Mike. She can't lie to him, and even if she tried he'd see straight through her.

There's a pause before Mike speaks again. "Just be careful okay, I can't lose you again. You or El."

"You won't lose us," Faye promises. It occurs to her that she said virtually the same thing to El on the bus and Faye smiles - they are twins, after all. Checking that no-one is around, Faye leans into Mike's shoulder and he rests his chin on top of her head. Neither of them are prone to showing affection (particularly in public), but right now they're both scared and they need each other. Mike's scent is reassuring and familiar and Faye wishes she could stay like this for a few more minutes, but then the backdoor opens and they break apart.

"It's time Faye," Nancy announces. The twins get to their feet and head inside.

"By the way," says Mike as they climb the steps. "If you ever make me think you're dead again, I'll kill you."

Faye raises her eyebrows. "Because that's not counter-intuitive."

Mike is giving her his 'I'm not messing around' face so Faye rolls her eyes and throws her hands up in resignation. "Okay fine, if you ever think I'm dead again, you have permission to kill me."

"I wasn't asking for permission," Mike scoffs.

"Well tough, you got it."

The two continue bickering as they follow Nancy through the house and out onto the front porch where the others are waiting. Everyone has gathered to see the groups off and Faye takes it in turns to hug those who will be staying behind. Even Steve, despite the fact she hardly knows him.

"Go kick some monster ass!" grins Dustin.

"You can do it," Max echoes.

"We're all behind you," encourages Lucas.

"Knock 'em dead, kid. Literally," Steve nudges.

She saves Mike for last, squeezing him as tightly as she can. Mike returns the gesture, turning at the last minute to whisper in her ear. "Bring him home."

Faye tells them to be careful for the hundredth time before walking over to Jonathan's car, where he, Nancy and Ms. Byers are waiting. Faye can see Will lying unconscious on the backseat, his head cradled in Ms. Byers' lap.

Hold on Will she thinks Just a little longer

"Faye." Eleven appears behind her just as she is about to open the car door. "Don't let it trick you."

Faye frowns. "Trick me?"

"Like it did before, at the hospital," Eleven prompts and Faye understands. The monster is going to do everything in its power to

throw Faye off, to make her doubt herself. But she isn't going to fall for that again.

"I won't."

Eleven smiles at her and the two girls embrace before Hopper's voice calls out. "El, come on. We gotta go."

They release each other and Faye slides into the backseat next to Ms. Byers, placing Will's cold legs over her lap. The engine hums to life and Jonathan speeds down the dirt road leading away from the house, Hopper's cruiser hot on his tail. At some point, Faye feels Ms. Byers take her hand and she grips it back.

As Nancy puts it, Hopper's cabin is actually "kinda nice." He's clearly put effort into making it a proper home for Eleven over the past year. Well hidden in a clutch of trees, it consists of a cosy living room and kitchen, a single bedroom and a bathroom; large enough to be comfortable, but compact enough to remain undetected by passersby. Not that it's likely anyone would venture this far into the woods - at least, Faye hopes they wouldn't. The last thing they need is any interruptions.

Faye, Nancy and Ms. Byers carry in the assortment of heaters and radiators they've brought with them, while Jonathan carries a still unconscious Will and lays him on the couch. Faye kneels beside him and places her hand over his, finding his skin ice cold. Uneasiness settles in her stomach; the heat was on full-blast in the car the entire journey, and he was wrapped in a thick blanket - he should have at least warmed up a little. The monster is clearly stronger than she thought...

"Now what?" says Nancy.

Ms. Byers turns to Faye. "What do you need? Tell us what to do and we'll do it."

The three adults look at her expectantly, awaiting Faye's instruction. She takes a deep breath and speaks in a clear, steady voice. "Turn on the heaters as high as they'll go. Close all the doors and windows and

start a fire," she gestures to the hearth in the corner of the room.

"What about Will?" Jonathan asks.

Faye glances at Will's small form and narrows her eyes. They can't take any chances. "Tie him down and put him as close to the fire as you can."

With the seconds slipping away, the group gets to work transforming the cabin. Nancy begins piling wood into the fireplace; Ms. Byers secures each of the windows and bolts the front door; while Faye and Jonathan clear a path and push the bed from the adjacent room into the living area, as near to the hearth as they can without fear of the sheets catching fire. In need of something to tie Will down with, Jonathan rifles through the dusty kitchen drawers and cabinets until he finds a length of rope, which he uses to bind Will's wrists and ankles to the bed. When everything is ready, Ms. Byers looks to Faye for approval; she gives a single nod and they switch on the heaters as Nancy flicks a match into the fireplace. The flames ignite with a crack, sizzling to life and licking their way along the blocks of wood until a large fire is blazing. Now all they can do is wait for the monster to wake up.

It doesn't take long for the temperature in the cabin to rise from toasty, to uncomfortably hot, to scorching. Beads of sweat dot across Faye's forehead, gluing her hair to her face. She wipes them away periodically, but they stubbornly reappear as her body struggles to cope with the intense heat. Anything the group can get their hands on (old newspapers, cushions etc.) is used to fan themselves, but it has little effect. The cloying air is almost too hot to breathe.

Faye fights the temptation (desperation, even) to open a window or splash cold water over her face. She can't afford to lose focus or be caught off guard, even for a second. Her eyes never leave Will, straining for the slightest twitch or movement - but there's nothing. In an effort to cool down, she shrugs off the denim jacket Dottie gave her in Chicago and tosses it aside with disgust, making a note to burn it if they run out of firewood. She also carefully removes Will's sweater from around her waist, realising it has been there the entire time. Like she's been keeping a piece of him with her.

Just as this thought enters her mind, Will's eyes snap open.

He attempts to sit up before his arms catch on the restraints. "Wh-what's happening?!" Will cries, panic lacing his words. He tugs desperately at the ropes and Faye is reminded of an animal caught in a hunter's trap. Suddenly, his spine contorts violently and he lets out an agonized scream. *"It hurts!"*

Faye winces. She knows it isn't really Will, but it's horrible to watch nonetheless. It's still his body and his voice screaming out in pain.

"It hurts! It hurts! Let me go! Let me go!"

Will thrashes wildly, kicking his legs and banging his head against the pillow over and over again. He looks like he's been possessed by a demon, which technically isn't far from the truth. Unable to take any more, Faye steps forward.

"Get out."

Will looks at her and tries to sit up again. "Faye! Let me go, please let me go," he begs. "Why are you hurting me?"

Guilt flares in Faye's chest, but it's quickly replaced by anger. The monster is trying to manipulate her, playing on her affection for Will to get her to do what it wants.

"You're not Will," she spits through gritted teeth. "Get out!"

The monster doesn't give up. "Please, please! Faye please! *Help me!*"

"I SAID GET OUT OF HIM!"

Will stops struggling. The green drains from his irises as they blacken and glaze over into emptiness. Then without warning, his neck snaps backwards with a sickening crunch, and what looks back at them is plainly and horrifyingly inhuman. Unblinking eyes stare out of an unnaturally pale face, as if there's no blood beneath the surface. Faye shivers as the monster bares its teeth.

"You're too late" it snarls, and Ms. Byers shrieks at the deep, sinister voice coming out of Will's mouth. *"He's already dead."*

"Liar!" Faye bites. "You're a liar!"

Its mouth twists into a grin. *"He died screaming for you, and you didn't save him."*

Faye's body is wracked with spasms, her fingernails digging so hard into her palms they draw blood. The monster leans forward.

"You left him," it breathes, jet black eyes piercing her. *"You left him for dead."*

"NO!"

Faye's hand flies up and a blast of energy surges red-hot down her arm. The monster makes a strangled noise as its own fingers close around its neck, the veins in its throat pulsing furiously. Shaking from the strain, Faye throws all of her energy into squeezing as hard as she can - imagining it's her fingers around the monster's neck. It coughs and splutters as Faye forces it to asphyxiate itself, foam bubbling at the corner of its mouth.

"STOP! YOU'RE KILLING HIM!" Ms. Byers' voice cries. Faye looks up and gasps as she sees Will's face turning blue.

She instantly lets go, blood pouring from her nose. The monster sucks in a large gulp of air, then it turns to Faye and lets out a cruel, mocking laugh. Faye hardly registers it, still in shock as to what she has just done; she let her anger get the better of her, and it almost killed Will. Wiping the blood away, Faye steadies herself, refocusing her mind. She can't just attack like she did with the Demodogs - she has to get the monster *out* of Will's body.

"Put more wood on the fire," Faye demands. The others hesitate, whether out of fear or uncertainty Faye isn't sure, but she doesn't have the patience for either. "DO IT!"

Nancy grabs another log and tosses it into the flames. The monster hisses and writhes on the bed, and Faye seizes her chance while it's distracted. She jumps forward and grabs its face with both hands, ignoring the vicious snarls spewing from its mouth. Faye closes her eyes and blocks out everything around her; the heat, the screams, the

arms trying to shove her away - concentrating only on infiltrating the monster's mind.

A stream of images flash into her vision, all of which are shrouded in a cold, grey fog that chills her to the bone. Faye realises with a start that she is seeing into the Upside Down. It's like Hawkins, but it's not; everything is damp and decayed, with no sign of life or warmth anywhere. The buildings are rusted and crumbling, as if no-one has set foot in them for centuries; and a thick layer of cloud hangs ominously overhead - one that would smother even the brightest sunlight. Everything - the arcade, the library, the movie theatre - is in ruins. The entire town is nothing but a toxic wasteland.

Suddenly, the vision shifts to the school field where Faye first saw the monster. A fierce lightning storm rages against a blood red sky, and a faceless black mass that looks like a giant spider looms over the school. And there, pinned to the ground underneath one of its sprawling legs, is Will.

"Will!"

The creature's head lifts and even though it doesn't have a face, Faye can *feel* its anger. The very air around her stings with it. Lightning explodes across the sky as it suddenly lunges at her, and Faye's head sears in pain as she is ripped back into reality. The force of it knocks her backwards and she just manages to grab the corner of the bedpost before hitting the floor. Something wet sticks to the front of her t-shirt and Faye glances down to see an alarmingly large pool of blood - *her* blood - collecting under her chin.

"It's not working!" Jonathan exclaims.

Faye pulls herself up and staggers to the head of the bed, feeling as if she could pass out any second. Her head is throbbing so badly she can hardly see straight, let alone use her powers again. Jonathan's right - it's not working. The monster is just too strong.

As if it can hear what she's thinking, the monster sneers at her. *"He's mine."*

And then Faye does something no-one expects. Not the monster, not

Ms. Byers, Jonathan or Nancy - not even Faye herself.

She leans down and kisses Will.

15. Deal?

Will goes completely still.

His body, which only a moment ago was thrashing wildly, falls limp against the mattress.

Faye's hands grip Will's face, holding on to him with everything she has. She doesn't have a clue what she's doing - all she knows is that she needs to get through to Will somehow. Faye crashes her lips against his, pouring every emotion she has ever felt for him into the kiss. Her nerves the day they first met. Her happiness when they agreed to be best friends. Her fear when he went missing. Her heartbreak when she thought he was dead. Her relief when she wrapped her arms around him for the first time after he came back. Her butterflies when he caught her wearing Nancy's make-up and told her she was pretty. And most of all, her belief in him; her unflinching knowledge that he isn't the victim everyone thinks he is - but the strongest person she's ever met.

Come on Will Faye pleads. Fight it. Come back... come back to me

Kissing him wasn't an intentional move on Faye's part; it was as if there were an invisible tether between them, drawing her to him with a force she couldn't resist. It felt as imperative as breathing - like their existence depended on her lips finding his in that moment. And just for a second, so brief Faye can't be sure it actually happened, she feels the tiniest press of Will kissing her back.

Only when her lungs start to burn for lack of oxygen does Faye finally pull away. The second her lips leave his, Will's mouth gapes open and a column of black smoke shoots up towards the ceiling. The lights in the cabin flicker as it bounces off the walls, knocking over furniture and sending splinters flying in every direction. Faye ducks as it soars over her head, howling like wind in a thunderstorm. Footsteps run towards the door followed by the sound of bolts clicking, and when Faye looks up again the smoke is spiraling out into the night - leaving only a trail of wisps in its wake.

The last thing she is aware of is someone calling her name before

consciousness abandons her.

When Faye opens her eyes again, the room is spinning. Shapes drift in and out of her vision, but she can't see properly past the spots popping and fizzing in front of her. She is vaguely aware of voices, even though they sound far away and distorted. Taking a few deep breaths, Faye lies perfectly still and waits for the shapes to refine into clarity. After a moment, something cold touches her lips; she leans away from it before realising it's a glass of water and gulping down the entire contents.

"Faye?"

Nancy. That's Nancy's voice. Faye squints and her sister's anxious face slowly comes into focus above her. "N-Nance?"

"Oh thank God!" Nancy dives down and wraps her arms around Faye, who manages a small squeeze in return.

"Is she okay?" A voice asks from across the room. It sounds familiar, but Faye's brain is still too fried to place it.

"I think so," Nancy answers, pressing her hand against Faye's forehead. "She's still feverish and she's lost a lot of blood, but I think she'll be okay."

"We'll take them both to the hospital, just to be sure," the voice responds.

Both? The word tugs at something in the back of her mind - something important that she should be remembering.

"We need to call her mom first," a third, female voice interjects. "Poor Karen must be worried sick."

Suddenly, another voice speaks - one that Faye recognises immediately. "Faye?"

Faye is snapped out of her daze. "*Will.*"

Ignoring the protests from her aching head, Faye sits up on the couch

and shakily gets to her feet, assisted by Nancy. When she turns around, a gasp escapes her. Will is sitting on the bed, Ms. Byers and Jonathan either side of him; he's deathly pale and drenched in sweat (as they all are), but his eyes are bright and green again. It's him. It's *really* him.

When he sees her, Will's face lights up and he attempts to stand, but Ms. Byers holds him back. "Hey hey, easy! No sudden moves. I don't want you passing out again."

Jonathan shakes his head. "Mom, come on. She just saved his life - would you let them hug already?!"

Ms. Byers hesitates, but she's too late. Will wriggles out of her grip and jumps up at the same moment Faye runs forward; they meet in the middle and throw themselves into each other's arms. Despite her severe dehydration, Faye bursts into tears that are a mixture of relief and delirium - clutching Will to her so tightly she must be choking him, but he doesn't tell her to let go. For a long while, they just stand there clinging to each other, *absorbing* each other. As if they're both scared the other will disappear if they stop.

Eventually, Faye leans back just enough to see Will's face, but keeps a firm grip on his hands. "Are you okay?"

Will nods. "Yeah, yeah I'm okay. Are you?"

"I think so."

Worry settles on Will's face as he glances down at Faye's shirt. "You're bleeding."

Faye stares at him for a few seconds and laughs.

"What?" Will asks.

"You just had an exorcism performed on you, and you're worried about my nosebleed?"

Spots of red bloom on Will's cheeks as Ms. Byers, Jonathan and Nancy join in the laughter. Will rolls his eyes, but he's smiling - and Faye can't help pulling him in for another hug. In a not-so-subtle

attempt to give them some privacy, Nancy suggests going outside for some fresh air and Jonathan follows suit, dragging Ms. Byers with him. As they leave, Will's face suddenly turns sombre.

"I'm sorry."

Faye frowns. "For what?"

"For what the monster said to you at the hospital," Will clarifies, his eyebrows knitting together in a pained expression. "It made me watch. It made me watch as it lied to you, and I saw how upset you got." Faye remembers the monster telling her that Will didn't want to be her friend anymore, how it had felt like her heart was being ripped out. Looking at her earnestly, Will continues, "None of it was me. I would never say those things about you. *Ever.*"

Faye has never heard Will speak with such conviction and it stirs something deep in her chest. She squeezes his hands. "I know. And I'm sorry too. I shouldn't have left, I shouldn't have let it get to me. I should have stayed with you-"

Will smiles warmly. "Doesn't matter. You came back."

Faye mirrors his expression and Will looks like he wants to say something else, but he is cut off by the lights in the cabin suddenly shining far beyond their natural brightness. Faye shields her eyes from the blinding glow, which is so intense it feels as if the cabin has been plunged into daylight. As quickly as it appeared, the light extinguishes. Faye senses the change immediately.

"She did it. El closed the gate."

"Mom *please!*" Faye whines as she and Mike follow her around the kitchen. "It's just one night."

"We'll never ask for anything ever again!" Mike adds.

Faye scowls at him. *Don't overdo it!*

Their mom is doing her best to ignore them as she chops carrots for dinner. "I told you both, no means no."

In all fairness, the Wheeler twins deserve to be grounded. They did put their mom through hell with worry. Faye dreads to think what would have happened if her mom found out about Chicago - she probably would have been grounded for the rest of her life, rather than just until Christmas. Faye would have accepted this punishment without argument, until she realised it meant her and Mike wouldn't be allowed to attend The Snow Ball.

Even though she's never been before, Faye was really looking forward to it this year. Now that El is back and the monster is gone (meaning Will is Will again), it's the perfect opportunity for the party to just spend a night enjoying themselves - like normal kids their age. Subsequently, she and Mike have spent the better part of a week begging their mom to change her mind.

"But mom, we start high school in the fall-" Faye begins.

"-and if we don't go this year we'll never get another chance!" Mike finishes.

Scraping the chopped carrots into a bowl, Mrs. Wheeler puts the knife down and sighs. Faye holds her breath, sensing her mom's resolve weakening.

"Alright," she finally relents. "You can go. *But*," she points a finger at them accusingly. "I want you both back here at 10PM on the dot."

"We promise!" Faye and Mike exclaim in unison, hardly able to contain their excitement.

The next morning at school, Faye wastes no time in telling Will the good news as they chain up their bikes. They're a little early for class, so the pair sit on the stone steps outside the entrance and wait for the others to arrive.

"D'you wanna come over and watch a movie tonight?" Faye asks.

"I thought you were grounded?" says Will.

Faye nods. "We are, but if you guys come to us we don't have to leave the house, so it doesn't count right?"

Will laughs at her mischievousness and says he'll ask his mom after school. Ms. Byers doesn't usually let him out on week nights, but now that Jonathan and Nancy are dating (which Faye saw coming a mile off, but still feels weird), Will has a free ride to the Wheelers' anytime he wants. A spell of comfortable silence stretches between them before Will glances over his shoulder to make sure no-one is listening, then lowers his voice.

"I never actually thanked you."

Faye can tell by Will's tone what he's referring to. It's been on her mind for some time.

"You don't have to," Faye answers.

"Yes I do-"

"No, you don't understand," Faye interrupts, choosing her words carefully. "You don't have to thank me because it wasn't me who defeated the monster. It was you."

Will frowns at her. "What?"

Since the night in the cabin, people have been showering Faye with praise; saying that she banished the monster and saved Will's life, but it's not true. "When the monster left your body I wasn't using my powers," Faye explains. "All I did was try to get through to you."

Faye deliberately avoids saying 'All I did was kiss you,' because she doesn't want to make things awkward. She isn't even sure Will remembers it happening; which is probably a good thing - how do you explain to your best friend that you kissed them out of the blue while they were possessed, in front of their mom and brother? Embarrassment burns Faye's cheeks at the thought.

"You did get through to me. But you did more than that."

Faye looks at him in confusion and Will takes a deep breath.

"Ever since this whole thing started, no-one treats me like *me* anymore. They all think I need protecting, that I can't look after myself. But they forget that I survived in the Upside Down on my

own all that time, and that I figured out how to stop the monster and told them to close the gate." The words fly heatedly out of Will's mouth, as if he's been bottling them up for a long time. "I'm not saying I want a medal or anything, I'm just sick of being treated like a baby."

Faye stays silent, letting him blow off steam. Will's voice softens. "I know they care about me, but none of them really *believe* in me... apart from you." Her heart pulses in her ears. "You made me realise that I could fight it. No-one else could have done that."

"I don't know - I think setting fire to the vines helped," Faye points out. After they left the Byers' house that night, Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Max and Steve had driven out to the pumpkin field, snuck into the tunnels and set the hive mind alight. This had drawn the Demodogs away from Hawkins Lab so that Eleven had a clear shot to the gate - and no doubt helped to distract the monster itself. Another reason why Faye feels she can't take credit for saving Will.

Will groans impatiently and elbows Faye's ribs. "Are you ever gonna stop being so stubborn?"

Faye smirks. "Nope."

Sighing, Will fixes Faye with his green eyes. "Okay fine - we defeated the monster together. Deal?"

As soon as Will's eyes meet hers, an irritating yet increasingly frequent habit takes its cue - Faye's breath hitches and she is forced to look away. It's been happening since the night in the cabin. For some reason, Faye has been finding it difficult to keep her composure around him - particularly when she looks into his eyes. It's as if they have the power to reduce her to a nervous, stammering wreck all of a sudden. What she doesn't understand is *why* Will has this effect on her now when he never used to.

Shaking it off, Faye smiles at him. "Deal."

Will's body is angled towards hers so that their knees are touching. They seem to have got into the habit of this recently - maintaining some form of physical contact wherever they go. Whether it's sitting

together, playfully kicking each other under the table during D&D, poking each other when they pass in the hall at school... Faye keeps telling herself it's because they're happy to have things back to normal, but that doesn't explain the breath hitching, or why her skin tingles and grows warm wherever Will touches her.

Of course, there is one explanation.

But Faye has locked this explanation away in a box at the back of her mind and absolutely refuses to open it, or even allow herself to think about it. Will is her best friend, and his friendship means more to her than anything else in the world. She can't risk jeopardizing that. She just can't...

When Faye looks up again, Will is watching her, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth.

"Faye-

"Sup losers!"

Dustin's greeting startles them and Faye feels Will shuffle away from her, ignoring the pang of longing at the loss of his touch. Lucas, Max and Mike follow behind him, Lucas shoving past Dustin to open the doors for Max.

"Ladies first," Lucas bows. Max rolls her eyes and steps through - Lucas hurrying after her with a dopey smile plastered across his face. He lets go of the doors at the last second and they slam loudly in Mike's face.

"Hey!"

Sniggering, Will leans towards Faye. "Bet you a bag of Reese's he asks her out by The Snow Ball."

Faye grins. "You're on."

Author's note: I hope everyone is enjoying the story! The next chapter is The Snow Ball, which I've actually had written for ages and am really excited to post. Reviews greatly appreciated,

as always!

16. Like this

"Are you sure this is gonna look okay?" Faye asks.

Nancy steps back, admiring her masterpiece. "Okay? You're gonna look more than okay, you're gonna look gorgeous."

Faye glances at the clock on her sister's bedroom wall for the sixth time in ten minutes. The Snow Ball starts at 7PM - precisely one hour from now. When Nancy offered to do her hair and make-up for the dance, Faye happily agreed (never having been much good at it herself), but she didn't realize it would take so long. First, Nancy had applied two coats of shimmering purple polish to Faye's nails (chosen specially to match her dress), then ordered her to sit still and let them dry while she carefully brushed and styled Faye's hair. There had been a slight setback at the make-up stage when Faye's fidgeting caused Nancy to accidentally poke her sister in the eye with the mascara, but they'd managed to power through it. Usually, Faye wouldn't care about being late, but tonight she just can't seem to relax. Her stomach feels like it's twisted itself into a huge knot and her palms keep sweating, no matter how often she wipes them.

"Are we done here?"

Nancy's eyebrows furrow in concentration as she brushes a light pink powder onto Faye's cheeks. "Almost, just keep still. What're you so nervous about anyway? It's just a dance."

"I know," says Faye. "Just don't want to be late."

Nancy's mouth twitches like she's trying not to smile. "It wouldn't have anything to do with Will, would it?"

Suddenly, it's not just the powder coloring Faye's cheeks. "No. Why?"

"Are you sure?"

When Faye doesn't respond, Nancy puts the brush down on her dresser and sits on the edge of the bed. "Okay, I know Mike's your twin, but he's still a boy which makes him useless at this kinda stuff.

So as your sister, I want you to feel like you can talk to me."

Faye raises her eyebrows. "About...?"

"Oh come on, Faye! About you and Will!"

Her blush deepens and Faye fiddles with the hem of her dress. "What about me and Will?"

"That you like each other."

Nancy's voice is so matter-of-fact, like it's the most obvious thing in the world. Faye's heart doubles its pace. "What? No! No that's not... He's my best friend!"

"Is that what you're scared of? That if you admit your feelings for each other it could ruin your friendship?" Nancy asks gently.

"No!" Faye snaps. The word jumps out of her mouth instinctively - a reflex, almost. But as soon as she hears it out loud, she knows it's a lie. The box she locked away at the back of her mind begins to rattle, its contents desperate to break out. Will is her best friend, he's been her best friend for the past ten years. But if Faye is completely honest, there's always been something more between them. Something that's not there with Dustin or Lucas. She's just never been willing to admit it to herself.

Eventually, a single word forces itself out of Faye's mouth. "Maybe."

She squeezes her eyes shut and waits for Nancy to laugh at her, but instead a comforting arm wraps around her shoulders.

"Faye, it's okay to be scared. I was scared when things started happening with Jonathan," Nancy admits. "We started out as friends, spent a lot of time together. Then we got closer and-"

"Had sex?" Faye grins.

Nancy's eyes bulge and she retracts her arm. "Shutup! I'm trying to help you here!"

"Sorry, couldn't resist."

Faye can see the grin tugging at Nancy's lips, despite her narrowed eyes. "The point is that, when it feels right with someone, even if it's scary, you have to just go for it. Because trust me, it's not easy finding someone it feels right with."

"You mean Steve?" Faye clarifies. She can tell that Nancy feels guilty about hurting Steve, even if it wasn't her fault she fell for Jonathan instead.

Nancy sighs sadly. "Yeah. I thought we were meant to be, but I was wrong."

Faye considers this a moment. "But what if I'm wrong about Will?"

Her sister stares at her like she's an idiot. "Come on. I've seen the way you look at each other, especially after what happened in the cabin." Faye's cheeks flush again. "You've already been through more together at thirteen than most people go through their entire lives."

Deep down, Faye knows Nancy is right, but it does nothing to curb the doubts firing themselves at her like bullets. *What if he doesn't like me? What if talking about it makes things awkward? What if our friendship will never be the same? What if it wrecks the entire party?* These thoughts spin round and round in Faye's head until she starts to feel dizzy.

A knock at the door silences her inner turmoil. Mike enters wearing a smart brown jacket over a patterned blue jumper, with a red tie and black trousers. Mike hates ties and can be wrestled into them for only two occasions - weddings and funerals. Since The Snow Ball is neither, Faye can only assume he is trying to impress El. If she turns up, that is. Hopper had insisted it was too risky for her to come, despite the group's pleas. This hadn't done him any favors with Mike, whose opinion of the Chief was poor at the best of times. Eventually, they'd persuaded him to "think about it", which in adult language meant "I'll pretend to consider it so you stop bugging me, but the answer is still no." Apparently, given his wardrobe choice, Mike is remaining hopeful.

"Mom says we should leave in ten minutes if we don't want to be late," says Mike.

Faye's skin prickles with nerves and for a moment she feels like she's going to throw up, half rising out of her seat to dash to the bathroom. Either noticing the green hue of Faye's face or using some sort of big sister sixth sense, Nancy puts a soothing hand on her back.

"Okay, breathe. You'll be fine, just remember what we talked about."

"What did you talk about?" Mike asks.

"Girl stuff," Nancy answers immediately and Mike pulls a face, dropping the subject. She then grabs Faye's hand and pulls her in front of the full-length mirror. "So what do you think?"

The reflection staring back at her almost looks like a different person. Faye's hair falls to her shoulders in soft, elegant curls, held in place with two jeweled clips either side. The makeup makes her look older (although it's a lot nicer than the harsh, goth makeup Dottie used); subtle black mascara and a dusting of glitter on each eyelid, complete with her favorite bubblegum lipgloss. Her dress (which she spent a week picking out) is deep purple with something called a sweetheart neckline - which according to Nancy is very "in" right now - finished with a pair of small black heels.

"You look beautiful," Nancy smiles.

Faye chews her bottom lip. "You think?"

"Absolutely, although I have to take some of the credit," she jokes.

Mike sighs impatiently. "Can we go now?"

The three siblings head downstairs where their parents are waiting; their mom with her dreaded camera and their dad staring over his shoulder at the TV. Mrs. Wheeler gasps when she sees them.

"Oh look at you all!" she gushes, virtually jumping up and down with excitement. "So grown up!" She elbows their dad. "Ted, don't you have anything to say to your children?"

"Hmm?" he blinks. "Oh, yeah. You brush up good, kids."

Faye doesn't bother responding to this, nor do Mike or Nancy. There

could have been some random kids off the street standing in front of him and he probably wouldn't have noticed. Nudging him out of the way, Mrs. Wheeler holds up the camera.

"Picture time!"

"*Mom!*" Faye, Mike and Nancy groan in unison.

"Oh come on, just a few!"

Twenty three Polaroids later and they're finally getting into the car. Faye and Mike are in the backseat and Faye makes a point of staring out the window the entire journey, knowing that Mike will be able to tell something's up if they make eye contact. With each block they get closer to Hawkins Middle School, Faye's anxiety grows and by the time they pull up outside, her mouth is bone dry. Mrs. Wheeler waves goodbye, reminding them of the 10PM curfew before driving off. Music is already pouring out from the gym and beams of brightly colored lights seep under the doors.

"Okay guys, have fun," says Nancy as she heads off to the drinks table where she'll be working for the evening, shooting Faye a pointed glance before slipping through the doors.

Faye and Mike linger in silence. Out of the corner of her eye, Faye can see him fidgeting with his tie. Maybe she isn't the only one who's nervous.

"Did you hear from El?" she asks.

Mike's cheeks redden. "No."

Faye is toying with the idea of teasing him about it when Max runs up to them. "Hey guys!"

It comes as no surprise that Max has chosen to forgo wearing a dress, but she still looks pretty. The black jumper with multicolored stripes and pinky-orange skirt suits her personality much better, anyway. Her eyes widen when she sees Faye.

"Wow, you look really nice!"

Now it's Faye's turn to blush. "Thanks, so do you."

The redhead rolls her eyes. "Yeah right, my mom pulled out half my hair trying to put it in this fancy braid that no-one's even gonna notice."

"I can think of someone who'll notice," mutters Mike. Faye stifles a snigger, remembering her bet with Will and wondering who will owe who a pack of Reese's after tonight. The thought of Will sets her nerves off again and Faye looks at the imposing double-doors of the gym, which suddenly seem heavy and claustrophobic.

Come on, get a hold of yourself Faye admonishes. Over the past couple of months, she's discovered she has mind control powers, fought real-life monsters, traveled to Chicago and back without her parents, helped to save her best friend's life - and she's worried about a stupid little school dance? Realizing how ridiculous she's being, Faye huffs out a laugh.

"What's so funny?" Mike asks.

"Nothing," Faye answers, feeling like the world's biggest idiot. "Shall we go in?"

The trio register with Mr. Clarke then head through to the gym, although it's barely recognizable as the plain old sports hall they're used to. Fairy lights have been strung from every available surface and the ceiling is covered in blue and white streamers, with a glittering disco ball hanging in the center. The floor is swimming in balloons and confetti and the words 'Snow Ball' are suspended over the entrance in huge, silver letters. The place is packed - the whole school must be in here.

"Wow," Max exclaims.

"I feel like I'm staring directly into the sun," Faye comments with a squint, making the other two laugh.

"Guys! Hey guys!"

Lucas' voice carries over the music as he elbows his way through the crowd, with Will in tow. "You made it!"

Faye's stomach flips when she sees Will. He's wearing a white shirt with a black sweater vest and blue tie. He looks handsome. Panic grips her as Faye suddenly worries she has said this out loud. She's never thought of Will as handsome before; not that he isn't usually, she's just never taken the time to appreciate it until now. Faye rolls her eyes at herself. *Great. Now I'm rambling even in my own head.*

Lucas wastes no time in complimenting Max's braid and Mike gives her his 'told you so' grin. The group start a conversation, but Faye's eyes keep drifting back to Will. To her surprise, he appears to be doing the same thing. They both quickly look away when they catch each other staring, Faye's heart pounding so loudly she wouldn't be surprised if it burst through her chest.

"Holy shit, what happened to you?" Mike cries.

Everyone turns around to see Dustin walking over with his hair twice its usual size. He freezes when he sees the looks on their faces. "What d'you mean what happened?"

"What?!"

"Dude?!"

"Your hair!" Max clarifies.

Lucas reaches up to poke it. "Is there a bird nesting in there?"

Dustin slaps his hands away. "What no, there's nothing wrong with my hair! There's no bird nesting in here, asshole!"

Faye suddenly realizes where she's seen that hair before. "Wait, have you been taking style advice from Steve?"

The party bursts into laughter and Dustin scowls at them. "I hate all of you."

Feeling guilty, Faye backpedals. "No really it uh, it suits you."

"Yeah," Lucas adds. "You've always been a dork and now you look like one too."

The laughter doubles in volume and Dustin announces that he's no longer their friend and intends to find a group who "appreciates style." Luckily, before he can storm off, the upbeat music fades out and *Time After Time* begins playing through the speakers. One by one, the people on the dance floor begin to pair off and rotate in slow circles to the music.

"Max?"

Max looks at Lucas whose face breaks into a cheesy grin. "Hey, um, it's nice right? Wanna um... Wanna like, you know... Just you and me?"

"Are you trying to ask me to dance, stalker?" Max smirks.

"No! Of course not," says Lucas. "Unless... you want to?"

"So smooth," Max deadpans. "Come on."

She grabs Lucas' hand and leads him into the crowd, where the two of them join the other couples. Lucas appears to be in a daze as his hands settle on Max's waist.

"You owe me a pack of Reese's."

Will's voice right in her ear makes Faye jump and she turns to see his signature wolfish grin stretched across his face. The last time she was this close to him was in the cabin; her eyes inadvertently flick down to Will's lips at the memory, before she realizes what she's doing and spins around - praying he didn't notice.

"Yeah," is all Faye can say, inwardly cursing at how lame she sounds. Just as she is fumbling for a better response, footsteps approach.

"Hey Zombie Boy!"

Faye looks up to see none other than Jennifer Hayes making a beeline for Will. "D'you wanna dance?"

Fury ignites in Faye's chest and ripples throughout her body, as if someone has injected her with liquid fire. Jennifer Hayes is the girl who was crying at Will's 'funeral' last year, and Faye has had a

vendetta against her ever since. She didn't even know Will, so what the hell was she doing at his funeral - let alone crying at it! And now she has the nerve to ask him to dance?! *Who does she think she is?!*

"Um, I, uh..." Will stammers, glancing awkwardly between Faye and Jennifer. Faye quietly seethes as Jennifer flashes Will a sickly sweet smile - and then she makes a huge mistake. Jennifer reaches for Will's hand. Almost without thinking, Faye jerks her head and Jennifer suddenly throws the cup of bright red punch she is holding all over her peach-colored dress. Jennifer squeals as a huge red stain spreads across the front of the fabric, soaking it through.

"Wow Jennifer, you must have had a wrist spasm or something," says Faye in her best sympathetic voice. "You might wanna clean that up."

Jennifer just stands there, looking despairingly at her ruined dress.

"Oh, and by the way," Faye adds, with a sudden rush of courage. "Will's dancing with me, sorry."

With that, Faye grabs Will's hand and leads him away from Jennifer, Mike and Dustin's stunned faces. She weaves through the revolving couples until a gap in the crowd materializes, then with her heart in her mouth, Faye turns to face Will. To her delight, he is beaming at her.

"I can't believe you did that!"

"Did what?" Faye asks, feigning innocence.

Will raises his eyebrows. "Oh come on. 'Wrist spasm?' Seriously?"

They look at each other for a few seconds before bursting into laughter.

"Okay, fine," Faye admits. "But I was just trying to help. You didn't seem like you wanted to dance with her."

When Will doesn't answer, Faye's face falls. "Unless... you did?"

"No! Definitely not!" Will exclaims and Faye's chest unclenches. "I mean, not in a mean way," he continues. "I'm sure she's nice and stuff,

but no I don't want to dance with her." He pauses and his tongue darts out to wet his lips the way he does when he's nervous. "Actually, I uh... I wanted to dance with you."

The ground under Faye's feet lurches. "You did?"

Will gives a small smile and nods. "Yeah."

"O-okay."

Trembling slightly, Faye rests her hands either side of Will's neck and feels his own hands gently grip her waist. Slowly, they fall into rhythm with the music, which has changed to *Every Breath You Take*. Within seconds, the rest of the world completely melts away and Faye forgets about everything that isn't Will Byers. For the first time, she allows herself to look at him properly, without worrying about him catching her. He truly is handsome; the suggestions of maturity are already showing in his defined jawbone and wide set features, and that's without taking into account his chestnut brown hair, bewitching green eyes or full lips. Faye catches herself before this thought goes any further. *Dangerous territory - stop.*

Will swallows thickly. "I've wanted to talk to you for a while," he begins. "I just never really knew, how to say it."

"Say what?"

"What happened in the cabin..."

Faye tenses. "Y-yeah?"

"Did you, I mean... you kissed me," Will says slowly.

Oh God - he does remember. Nerves begin to take hold again and Faye wonders whether this was a good idea after all. "Yeah. Sorry."

Will's next question, however, catches her off guard. "You're sorry it happened?"

The word 'yes' is on the tip of her tongue; the safe option, the cop-out, the answer that enables her to play the whole thing off as a mistake brought on by exhaustion and the heat. But Faye stops

herself. She's come this far - if she doesn't see it through now, she never will. "No."

She waits for Will to push her away, but as he so often does - he completely surprises her. The hands on her waist pull her closer, so that their noses are almost touching. "Me neither."

Faye freezes. Did she hear that right? She glances up and finds Will smiling at her. And did she imagine it, or did his eyes just dart down to her lips?

"You know, there is one good part to come out of the whole monster thing," Will continues, his breath hot on her cheek.

"Y-yeah?"

"All the things I used to be scared of before the monster, I'm not scared of anymore."

Faye looks at him curiously. "Like what?"

His voice lowers, as if it is only meant for her. "Like this."

And before Faye knows what's happening, Will leans in and kisses her.

Elation explodes into her veins, surging through her entire body - right from her fingertips down to her toes. Faye feels as if she's walking on air. It's perfect. It's right. *He's* right.

Will breaks the kiss and leans his forehead against Faye's, both of them reeling from what has just happened. After catching his breath, Will smiles warmly. Faye returns the gesture, and then they both dissolve into a fit of childish giggles.

"Well, I guess you beat me to it," Faye announces.

"What d'you mean?" Will asks.

"I was kinda gonna say all this stuff to you tonight, about... me and you," Faye explains. "I was talking to Nancy about it all day."

"Nancy?" he clarifies.

"Yeah, she told me I should just go for it. Why, what's the matter?"

Will shakes his head. "Nothing, it's just I had pretty much the exact same conversation with Jonathan."

"Really?"

Will nods and Faye narrows her eyes suspiciously. "You don't think they..."

"... were trying to push us together?" Will finishes.

"Like you needed pushing."

Faye and Will jump as Nancy twirls past grinning smugly, with Dustin in tow. "All we did was give you a nudge, and clearly that was all it took."

The pair look at each other and blush as Nancy laughs happily. Dustin makes his weird purring noise and they disappear back into the crowd. The surrealism of the encounter soon has Faye and Will laughing again too.

"Damn, they're good," says Will.

"Yeah," Faye agrees, not knowing whether to feel grateful to their older siblings for encouraging them, or embarrassed that they fell for it so easily.

But then Will kisses her again and nothing else matters.

17. Zombie Girl

EPILOGUE

Faye Wheeler has encountered many frightening things in her life. She's come face to face with nightmarish creatures, rubbed shoulders with murderers, and been exposed to a terrifying supernatural world that most people don't even know exists.

But none of that comes close to the sight of her twin brother finding out she kissed his best friend.

"WHAT?!" Mike bellows, his eyes glistening with fury. "YOU KISSED MY SISTER!"

Will looks like a deer in headlights, backing away and holding his hands out defensively. "Uh... Mike listen-"

Mike advances on him, hands balled into fists. "You know, it's a shame we had to go through all that to get you back... JUST SO I COULD KILL YOU!"

It's a good thing Will is a fast runner. He takes off at a sprint with Mike tearing after him, leaving the rest of the party standing outside The Snow Ball - including Eleven, who made it at the last minute.

"Um... should we do something?" asks Max, staring after them.

Faye sighs. "He'll get over it. Mike's always been a bit of a drama queen."

She'd been so preoccupied worrying about what Will would say when she admitted her feelings, that Faye hadn't even considered Mike's reaction. They've always been fiercely protective of each other; Faye remembers how she had warned Mike to stay away from El when they first found her, concerned that El might be dangerous. Of course, Mike had paid no attention, but that instinct to look out for each other is ingrained in them so deeply they can't help it. They're twins - it's in their blood.

Faye knows Mike would never hurt Will. He'll probably just do what

he usually does when things don't go his way; shout, sulk, then eventually deal with it. Quite frankly, Faye is too happy right now to even care. It still hasn't quite sunk in that she and Will *kissed* - multiple times. In fact, they spent pretty much the entire night dancing and kissing. Faye does feel slightly bad for ditching the others... or at least, she probably will tomorrow if she can get the smile off her face long enough.

A car horn beeps behind them and a woman with curly red hair waves from the front seat.

"Oh, that's my mom," says Max. "I guess I'll see you guys Monday?"

The group bids her goodnight and Faye doesn't miss the way Max's eyes linger on Lucas as she turns to leave.

"Speaking of kissing..." she says when Max's car drives off, raising her eyebrows at Lucas.

"Well let's just say you and Will weren't the only ones getting busy tonight," he smirks, looking extremely pleased with himself. "Oh by the way," he adds, turning to Dustin. "Pay up."

Dustin groans and shoves a hand into his pocket, pulling out a five dollar bill and slapping it into Lucas' waiting palm.

"What's that for?" asks Eleven.

"He bet me five dollars that Faye and Will would kiss tonight," Dustin explains.

Faye's eyes widen. "What?!"

Ignoring her, Dustin shakes his head. "Man, I really thought it would be at Christmas. You know; a conveniently placed bit of mistletoe, them giving each other their sappy ass drawings they think we don't know about."

Lucas scoffs. "Please, they've liked each other since the first grade - it was only a matter of time."

"I am *here* you know," Faye bites. How the hell did Lucas know she

and Will liked each other in first grade? Faye didn't even know it herself then!

Kicking a stone by his foot, Dustin huffs irritably. "This is so not fair! I'm out five bucks and I'm the only person who didn't get a kiss!"

Faye's eyes land on Eleven, who smiles shyly. So she and Mike did kiss, after all. Faye smiles back, glad that the two of them are finally able to be together. They both deserve some happiness after everything they've been through. And if nothing else, it should certainly make Mike a more pleasant person to be around; no more cursing at teachers or graffitizing bathroom stalls.

As if on cue, Mike and Will materialize around the corner. Will appears to be unscathed and has evaded Mike's wrath, for now at least.

"You guys good?" Dustin asks.

"Yeah, we're good," Will answers. Mike doesn't reply, but he doesn't refute Will's claim either. *It's a start* Faye muses.

Lucas crosses his arms. "Shake on it."

Mike scowls at him as if to say 'Don't push it,' but Lucas is having none of Mike's attitude.

"You know the rules Mike," he elaborates. "You drew first blood, you chased him."

Whatever tenuous grip Mike has on his temper slips again. "He drew first blood when he kissed Faye!"

"Technically, I kissed him first..." Faye mumbles, avoiding her brother's gaze.

Before Mike can respond to this, Eleven turns to him. "I don't understand. I thought you liked kissing?"

Mike's face goes bright red and Faye roars with laughter. Eleven feigns innocence, pretending not to realize how much she's just embarrassed him - but she throws Faye a devilish grin when the

others aren't looking. After they've composed themselves, Dustin reaches up to pat his hair - which is beginning to resemble a rapidly melting ice sculpture.

"I better go," he grimaces. "My hair's starting to deflate."

"Me too," Lucas echoes. "For the record Dustin, if you turn up at school next week with that hair you're not sitting with us."

Dustin scoffs. "You're just jealous you couldn't pull this off."

"*Oh yeah* - I'm just dying to look like Steve's ugly cousin."

The pair continue to fire insults at each other as they walk away, leaving just Faye, Will, Mike and El. For a moment, none of them seems to know what to say, but before the silence becomes too awkward, Mrs. Wheeler's car pulls into the parking lot. 10PM on the dot - just like she said.

"There's our ride," says Faye.

She looks at Will and they both move to hug each other before noticing Mike's icy glare and deciding it's probably best not to antagonize him any further this evening. Instead, Faye throws her arms around Eleven - taking great pleasure in the jealousy on Mike's face.

I can be just as petty as you Faye's eyes challenge.

Mike's narrow in response. *Try me.*

The twins say goodbye and head off to their mom's car. As Faye opens the door, she glances back at Will; he smiles at her and Faye's stomach is set aflutter, wishing she could run back and plant a final kiss on his lips.

That night, Faye lays awake into the early hours - replaying the feeling of Will's arms around her over and over. She can't explain how, but she knows beyond a doubt that he is doing the same thing.

From that day on, life in Hawkins assumes a semblance of normality.

The friendship group is stronger than ever and Max becomes an official party member (Mike having warmed to her now that El is back). They still spend the majority of weekends at the arcade, in the Wheelers' basement playing D&D, or in Hopper's cabin visiting Eleven - who isn't allowed to fully rejoin society yet.

To that end, in order to maintain discretion and ensure all gates to the Upside Down stay firmly closed - everyone agreed it was best that Faye and El keep the use of their powers to a minimum. For the most part, Faye sticks to the rule; particularly as neither of her parents know she has mind control abilities, and she doesn't fancy giving either of them a heart attack. However, the Wheelers have always had a mischievous streak in them - and every now and again, exceptions can be made. Nothing drastic, of course - just the odd alteration here and there. Whether it's subtly manipulating Mr. Clarke's mind to give them less homework, convincing their mom to let her and Mike stay out past curfew, or causing Jennifer Hayes to unceremoniously throw whatever beverage she is holding over herself if she sets foot within ten yards of Will.

"I still can't believe you did that," Max laughs as the group sit in the newly opened Starcourt Mall ice cream parlor.

Faye huffs, stabbing her banana split with more force than necessary. "She's lucky it was just her drink. I could blow her head up if I wanted to."

"Faye," Will chastises, elbowing her playfully.

"I didn't say I *would*, just that I *could*," says Faye. "...although it is tempting."

Now that Faye and Will, Mike and El, and Lucas and Max are all sort of dating, the group dynamic has shifted. As thrilled as Faye is that Will returns her feelings, she still feels weird calling him her 'boyfriend' - it sounds so... formal. When she talked to Nancy about it, her sister advised that they're probably too young for labels like that and they should just take things slow and let their relationship develop naturally. Will is first and foremost her best friend, and nothing will ever change that.

Dustin, however, has a different view on the situation. He's taken to complaining that he's tired of being a "seventh wheel" and while the rest of them laughed it off at first, he kept bringing it up to the point where it became irritating. Eventually, Mike declared that they needed to find Dustin a girlfriend.

"Hmm, who do we know that's blind and stupid?" Lucas wonders, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

Eleven kicks him under the table. "Don't be a mouth-breather."

"Yeah," Max agrees. "Dustin's awesome!"

Dustin grins and slides closer to her in the booth. "Oh yeah? Finally realizing you chose the wrong one, huh? Well, it's not too late-"

"In your dreams," Lucas quips, threatening him with his spoon.

"I wasn't talking to you," Dustin responds.

"Bite me."

Faye shakes her head, amused at their bickering. A flash of silver catches her eye as Will's spoon darts out to steal a scoop of her banana split.

"Maybe Dustin should ask out Jennifer so you don't have to be so jealous," he grins.

Color floods Faye's cheeks. "I'm not jealous."

Will laughs. "You're totally jealous."

"No I'm not!" she insists.

Will just smiles and bumps Faye's shoulder, lingering longer in her personal space than is strictly necessary. "Don't worry, you're cute when you're jealous."

Embarrassed, Faye glares at him - but one squeeze from Will's hand under the table and her glare melts away pitifully easily. She is quickly discovering the most annoying thing about Will is how hard

it is to be annoyed at him.

"Ahem."

The pair look up to see Mike staring daggers at them. "Unless you want me to throw up into my sundae, could you not?"

An hour later and Faye and Will are alone, walking back to Faye's house. Mike had insisted on escorting Eleven to the edge of the woods, where Hopper would be waiting to take her back to the cabin; and the other three had biked in, so made their own way. Faye is secretly grateful, because it means she gets time with Will away from her brother's withering glares.

"I know we joke about it, but do you think Dustin actually feels left out?" Faye asks. "You know, now that the rest of us are..."

She leaves the end of the sentence unsaid, still not quite ready to use words like 'couple' yet. Will's brow furrows in thought.

"Maybe. I mean, obviously he liked Max but she's with Lucas now."

Faye feels a pang of sympathy for Dustin, hoping all the seventh wheel stuff isn't to hide the fact he's actually upset. She makes a note to talk to him about it.

"You still owe me that pack of Reese's, by the way," Will adds, pointing a finger at her accusingly.

Faye smirks at him. "Sorry, I forgot. I guess I had other things on my mind that night."

"Oh yeah?" says Will, taking her hand and halting them both. "Like what?"

Her skin tingles at his touch. Faye leans in to him, repeating the words Will said to her at The Snow Ball. "Like this."

Faye has already lost count of the number of times she has kissed Will, but still nothing prepares her for it. The feeling of his lips against hers is as exciting, as dizzying and as wonderful as it was

during their first kiss. Feeling bold, she reaches up to cup his face and feels Will's hand come to rest on the small of her back.

"You know," says Faye, when they break for air. "You're not a half bad kisser - Zombie Boy."

Will grins. "You'd better watch out or they might start calling you Zombie Girl."

As soon as the words are out of Will's mouth, Faye knows then and there that she would rather be Zombie Girl than anyone else in the world.

"Let them."

END

18. POSSIBLE SEQUEL

Author's note

Thank you so much to everyone who has read, reviewed and supported this story. It's so lovely to hear that people have enjoyed it. I do have an idea for a sequel where I'll focus more on the relationships between the characters (Faye X Will, Mike X Eleven, Lucas X Max) as they become teenagers. I might even jump between Faye and other characters' points of view, to give the story more dimension. It will be M rated as the characters will be aged up to feature sexual themes.

However, I'd need to know that people are interested in reading it as the chapters do take quite a long time to write and it's only really worth it if I get enough feedback. So please either review or private message me if you would like to read a sequel.

Until then, thank you again!

19. UPDATE

Hello readers!

I can't believe it's coming up on a year since I first published Tether. It's so nice to see that people are still reading and reviewing the story! I know I promised a sequel, but considering that Stranger Things Season 3 is out in 99 DAYS (not that I'm excited or anything...) I've decided to tweak the sequel a bit. Rather than jumping ahead and aging the characters up, I'm going to do a direct continuation of Tether based on the new series - so the first chapter should be out in July.

I'm not scrapping my original idea, and I might release what I've already written (where the characters are 16/17) as a series of oneshots. Or I might even do a sequel to the sequel - it all depends how much feedback I get, and whether I have the time (real life has a habit of getting in the way). For those who asked, the stories are unlikely to contain explicit sex scenes; and if they do, I will put warnings in the appropriate places so readers can skip ahead if they prefer.

Thank you again and I look forward to posting the sequel in July!